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Untangling the Bizarre CIA Links to the Ground Zero Mosque

By Mark Ames
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So far, the debate over the proposed Islamic center near Ground Zero has unfolded along predictable lines, with the man at the center of the project, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, drawing attacks from the right painting him as a terrorist sympathizer with ties to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

But meanwhile, links between the group behind the controversial mosque, the CIA and U.S. military establishment have gone unacknowledged.

For instance, one of the earliest backers of the nonprofit group, the Cordoba Initiative, that is spearheading the Ground Zero mosque, is a 52-year-old Scarsdale, New York, native named R. Leslie Deak. In addition to serving on the group's board of advisors since its founding in 2004 by Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Deak was its principal funder, donating \$98,000 to the nonprofit between 2006 and 2008. This figure appears to represent organization's total operating budget--though, oddly, the group reported receipts of just a third of that total during the same time period.

Deak describes himself as a "Practicing Muslim with background in Christianity and Judaism, [with] in-depth personal and business experiences in the Middle East, living and working six months per year in Egypt." Born into a Christian home, Deak became an

Orthodox Jew and married a Jewish woman before converting to Islam when he married his current wife, Moshira Soliman, with whom he now lives in Rye.

Leslie Deak's resume also notes his role as "business consultant" for Patriot Defense Group, LLC, a private defense contractor with offices in Winter Park, Florida, and in Tucson. The only names listed on the firm's website are those of its three "strategic advisers." These include retired four-star General Bryan "Doug" Brown, commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command until 2007, where he headed "all special operations forces, both active duty and reserve, leading the Global War On Terrorism," and James Pavitt, former deputy director for operations at the Central Intelligence Agency, where he "managed the CIA's globally deployed personnel and nearly half of its multi-billion dollar budget" and "served as head of America's Clandestine Service, the CIA's operational response to the attacks of September 11, 2001."

Besides Pavitt, Brown and a third advisor, banker Alexander Cappello, the Patriot Defense Group is so secretive it doesn't even name its management team, instead describing its anonymous CEO as a former Special Forces and State Department veteran, the group's managing director as a former CIA officer experienced in counter-terrorism in hostile environments and the group's corporate intelligence head as a "23-year veteran of the U.S. Secret Service who worked on the personal security details of former Presidents Bush and Clinton."

Patriot Defense Group's primary business involves leveraging its government connections and know-how. The firm is divided into two divisions: one that "focuses exclusively on the needs of the U.S. military and law enforcement communities as well as the requirements of friendly foreign governments," and a corporate division, which "provides business intelligence and specialized security services to corporate clients and high net-worth family enterprises."

So, to recap: From 2006 to 2008, R. Leslie Deak worked as a "business consultant" to this super-secretive security contractor with ties to the CIA and counterterrorism forces, and in those same three years he also donated nearly \$100,000 in seed money to the foundation now advocating the construction of the so-called Ground Zero Mosque.

Interestingly, during the same three-year period during which the Deak Family Foundation was financing the Cordoba Initiative, Deak also donated a total of \$101,247 to something called the National Defense University Foundation. The National Defense University is a network of war and strategy colleges and research centers (including the National War College) funded by the Pentagon, designed to train specialists in military strategy. The organization recently announced a November 5 dinner gala in honor of Defense Secretary and former CIA chief Robert Gates. Sponsors include Northrup Grumman, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and...the Patriot Defense Group.

Deak also sits on the NDUF's board of directors, the chairman of which is Mark Treanor, the former general counsel for Wachovia bank from 1998 through its collapse in 2008 and a major bundler of campaign donations for the McCain-Palin ticket in 2008.

Wachovia, now owned by Wells Fargo, was recently fined \$160 million for laundering "at least \$110 million" in Mexican drug money between 2003 and 2008, while Treanor was Wachovia's general counsel, though the figure is likely higher since Wachovia admitted it didn't put any controls on at least \$420 billion--that's *billion*--in cash moved through its network of Mexico currency exchanges.

Which leads to another odd coincidence: Laundering money for drug lords is what brought down Deak & Co., the company run by Leslie Deak's father, Nicholas Deak, years ago. The elder Deak, a former top intelligence commander during World War II for the OSS (the forerunner of the CIA), was the founder of Deak-Perera, which became for a time one of the world's biggest foreign currency and gold dealers. But in 1984, a Presidential Commission on Organized Crime accused the firm of acting as a money laundering operation for Columbia drug cartels, who reportedly brought sacks of cash containing tens of millions of dollars into Deak's Manhattan offices. By the end of 1984, Deak & Co. had declared bankruptcy, and a year later, Nicholas Deak was murdered in the company's headquarters at 29 Broadway by a deranged homeless woman.

After the firm went bankrupt and Leslie Deak was left on his own, the corporation was broken up and sold off in pieces. One company that traces its beginnings to the defunct Deak empire is Goldline International, a business concern well known to fans of Glenn Beck as well as California investigators. Goldline is to Glenn Beck what General Electric was to Ronald Reagan: The company sponsors Beck's TV and radio shows as well as his touring act, and Beck is its public face. The Los Angeles County District Attorney's office, along with the Santa Monica City Attorney's office, are currently investigating Goldline for defrauding customers by railroading gullible customers into buying their most debased products.

Speaking of Glenn Beck, it has been reported that Saudi Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, the second-largest shareholder in News Corp., the parent company Fox News, which airs Beck's program, is also a major funder of Imam Rauf's projects, as Jon Stewart viewers heard all about last week.

Coincidences happen, of course. (For instance, Pamela Geller, the blogger who's become the leading voice denouncing the mosque project was once, bizarrely enough, associate publisher of *The New York Observer*.)

But add to this array of unexpected connections the work of Imam Rauf on behalf of the U.S. government—which includes serving as an FBI "consultant" and being recruited as a spokesperson by longtime George W. Bush confidante Karen Hughes, who headed up the administration's propaganda efforts in the Muslim world—and a compelling picture begins to emerge. Bush's favorite Imam, with backing from a funder with connections to the CIA, the Pentagon and the currency trading company that now sponsors rightwing firebrand Glenn Beck, proposes to build a mosque around the corner from the site of the most devastating terrorist attack ever visited on America. In the name of "[cultivating] understanding among all religions and cultures," he puts forth a project that offends a majority of Americans and deals a significant setback to the broader acceptance of

Muslim-Americans. It's a little like Billy "White Shoes" Johnson claiming the only reason he moonwalks after scoring a touchdown is to lower tensions on the football field and raise the other team's spirits.

Whether the Cordoba Initiative ever gets its way with the Ground Zero Mosque, it may well have a lasting legacy at odds with its stated intention: By damaging the very moderates and progressives who actually view New York, and the nation as a whole, as a tolerant melting pot, and strengthening the position demagogues on both sides, it will almost certainly deal a setback to interfaith relations. It will also help to hobble the Democratic party. Which just might have been the point all along.

Either that, or it's merely a coincidence that this controversy has erupted now, during crucial mid-term elections. In which case we can all go back to what we were doing before—either denouncing the Park51 Mosque as an affront to Americans, or championing it as a symbol of our fundamental rights—playing our accustomed roles in a drama that seems too perfect, somehow, to believe.