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Muslims in the Hills

Diana Marcum THE FRESNO BEE

BADGER The Hare Krishnas live around the bend. Buddhist monks, the Christian Right, white supremacists and Wicca devotees are tucked away in these pine-dotted Sierra Nevada foothills. Yet on a winding road of isolated enclaves, it's this place that's suspected and watched.

The FBI points to this little piece of mountain an hour from Fresno, where women in chadors walk through twilight fog to evening prayer, as a place with possible ties to an Islamic extremist group operating in Pakistan and across North America.

Some local cops warn: Stay away from the place. And if you must go, don't go at night; don't go alone.

Even before a Fresno County sheriff's deputy was slain in August, and the suspect said he stayed here, authorities had their eye on the Muslim people behind this white wooden gate: Were there terrorists in our midst?

But get behind the gate, and the people who live here tell you they are refugees from the ghettos, determined to raise their children far from the crime and drugs of poverty-ravaged neighborhoods.

The children easily outnumber the adults. Some of the men combine following religious observance and fighting the chill by covering their heads with Yankees ski caps.

They call their 1,800-acre ranch "Baladullah" -- "City of God" in Arabic.

Baladullah residents often refer to the teachings of Mohammed, always adding a "peace-and-blessing-be-upon-him." But the young men also debate whether Shaq or Kobe is a better basketball player, and the first thing the women ask visitors is, "Are you married? Do you have children?"

Their simple robes and elaborately polite manners cast an exotic air, but their voices echo the streets of Philly, the boroughs of New York.

One woman tells of growing up in the projects where she'd hardly seen a plant, and then trying to grow her own food. She watched greens sprout and grow and go to seed, missing the point when she was supposed to pick them.

A young man expecting his first child recalls how hard he worked to convince his wife's family that he was a good choice to be her arranged

EXHIBIT 24

the Valley

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husband.

A sullen-looking unarmed guard plays tour guide, showing the beginnings of an olive grove. He laughs as he points out the zig-zagging beginnings of the rows, planted before they figured out how to line them straight. There are more than 200 baby olive trees, and each must be watered by hand. The guard also shows off recently arrived chickens, but he doesn't stand too close to the coop because he's wearing new clothes he got for Ramadan, a month of fasting.

Along with the chickens and the olive groves, the community has a charter school with rows of computers and an array of monthly magazines that would make a newsstand proud. Out front is a U-haul business that is owned by GateWay Academy. But anyone calling to rent a van might have problems. During a month of constant phone calls, no one ever answered the U-Haul number.

Over rice pilaf and savory lamb, Baladullah residents tell about "beauty days," when all the women get together and try out home-made skin-care products. They tell of celebrations attended by their mountain neighbors. They tell how disgusted they are as American citizens to be expected to explain who they are, why they live here.

But they won't tell their names.

Salih Ghafur does not live here; he has a home in Fresno. Yet he appears to be a leader among the group of about 20 families that calls Baladullah home. He exercises authority with the slightest of eye contact. It is only on his nonverbal cue that two visitors are allowed a tour of the property.

He's a tall, bearded man. His family came from the Dominican Republic four generations ago. His grandfather fought in World War II, his father in Korea. Ghafur is a Vietnam veteran. He said being able to move between the identities of Hispanic and black has taught him about how people's perceptions can shift their attitudes.

When the World Trade Center fell, Ghafur said, he was engulfed in shock and grief. That was soon followed by worry for the people at Baladullah, a group of Muslims living quietly in the mountains. He felt the tragedy would be a prism, bending people's perceptions of all Muslims, coloring their views with fear.

There's a shooting range on the Baladullah property, a legacy from when this was home to Synanon, the drug-addiction-recovery cult. Ghafur said he is a former National Rifle Association member, but let his membership lapse because of the perception of Muslims as violent. He wanted to clean up the range and teach the children to shoot but decided that, too, would invite rumors.

"For other children, it might be good, teach discipline," he said. "But because

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of perception, it isn't good for our Muslim children. People would say we were training little militants."

He said the sounds of gunfire reported around this area last year weren't coming from Baladullah and rumors of guards with guns at the gates are untrue.

"Maybe one of the boys watching the gate used to get bored and shoot a BB gun at squirrels. But that was it," he said.

Ghafur said the federal list of terrorist organizations unfairly includes some people who are like that boy shooting BBs.

"Because the government labels someone a terrorist does not make it true," he said. "For years, the government called Martin Luther King a terrorist."

The current U.S. State Department list of terrorist organizations includes a group with links to Baladullah.

Ghafur's wife, Khadijah Ghafur, is the key figure in all documents relating to Baladullah. She is the main figure in the Heritage Development Corp., a nonprofit organization that owns the Baladullah land and other properties. She is the superintendent of GateWay Academy, a fast-growing chain of charter schools, which is owned by Heritage. She belongs to a half-dozen Muslim organizations, such as American Muslim Alliance, a mainstream political action group.

Her name also was listed recently as an officer on the Web site of the controversial group Muslims of the Americas. She said the affiliation was part of some paperwork she filled out to join a group delivering medicine to Africa in 2000.

Muslims of the Americas and its educational arm, the Qur'anic Open University, were founded by Sheik Mubarak Ali Jilani, a Pakistan Muslim mystic who started a following at a Brooklyn mosque in 1980. Until September, there was a sign for Qur'anic Open University near the gate at Baladullah.

Federal authorities believe Jilani also heads a black American Muslim sect called Al Fuqra. The State Department describes Al Fuqra (or Jamaa ul-Fuqra) as an Islamic sect that seeks to purify Islam through violence. Its members allegedly "purchase isolated rural compounds to live communally, practice their faith and isolate themselves from Western culture." Agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms said they believe Al Fuqra has been responsible for 17 bombings and 12 killings nationwide, including the 1984 bombing of a Hare Krishna temple in Colorado and 1990 killing of a Muslim cleric in Arizona.

Susan Fenger, a forensic document examiner, pursued the Colorado case for four years when she was a criminal investigator for the Colorado Department

of Labor and Employment.

Her investigation found a group connected to Muslims of Americas bilking \$355,000 from the Colorado Worker's Compensation fund. A related raid on a Colorado compound unearthed man-made caves containing assault weapons, including M-16s, M-14s, a dozen AK-47s and 6,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition. Five men were convicted of racketeering charges, including fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy to firebomb and murder.

"Muslims of Americas and the Qur'anic Open University are front organizations. If you have them, you have Fuqra," Fenger said. "Members of this group always live in rural areas. They're always involved in some sort of government fraud to bring in income, and behind the peaceful facade they're involved in covert activity."

Douglas Hurt, a Visalia lawyer representing Baladullah, said the Badger group is not connected to Al Fuqra.

"This is insanity," he said. "Here's a group of people trying to live in peace in the mountains. They don't smoke, don't drink, don't curse, don't lock their doors, and suddenly they're accused of being terrorists because they are Muslims living a rural life?"

The name "Al Fuqra" – "the poor" or "desolate" in Arabic – was heard first in local law enforcement circles in the late 1980s. According to sources involved with the investigation at that time, the FBI asked local authorities to keep an eye on Muslim communities in the Sierra foothills without giving a reason. When local authorities balked at providing manpower without being in the loop, FBI officials grudgingly told them they were watching for ties to Al Fuqra in Colorado, New York and other states.

U.S. marshals in March arrested James Hobson, who was visiting Baladullah, on a warrant for smuggling firearms in South Carolina. The arrest was made in Fresno behind a GateWay campus. No link between Hobson and Al Fuqra has been established.

But it was Aug. 21 when Fresno County sheriff's deputy Erik Telen was killed in an ambush that law enforcement and public attention turned to Baladullah with searing intensity.

The man accused of Telen's murder, Ramadan Abdullah, told investigators he was staying at Baladullah, seeking psychiatric treatment at the Qur'anic Open University. James Oppliger, Fresno County's chief deputy district attorney, said investigators believe Abdullah came from an Al Fuqra community near Binghamton, N.Y.

Baladullah residents knew and liked Telen. Elders said the boyish deputy stopped by the ranch to say hello on his rounds and helped more than one resident with car trouble.

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They describe Abdullah, 20, as a stranger who came seeking shelter about a week before the shooting. Baladullah teen-agers who had contact with him described him to adults as unnerving and strange. In court, Abdullah's lawyer questioned his client's mental competence to stand trial.

Khadijah Ghafur said the small community grieved for Telen, even as residents feared for themselves in the spotlight that followed. News helicopters buzzed overhead, and strangers drove past screaming, "Terrorists!"

"So many people were asking, 'Why is there a Muslim village in the mountains?' The people of Baladullah felt like they were on trial," Khadijah Ghafur said. "You have to understand the implications of this kind of questioning for people of color, especially Muslim people of color."

Khadijah Ghafur, 51, has a long list of respected supporters who sing her praises as an unceasing advocate for children and the poor.

She's a woman who bristles with energy. Her stylish pantsuits and head coverings follow fashion dictates and Islamic codes of modesty.

Born Deanna Moton, she was active in the civil-rights movement from childhood, she said. The daughter of a Christian minister, she converted to Islam in her college years.

She has traveled widely, organizing deliveries of medicine and clothes for refugees in the disputed Kashmir region between Pakistan and India, and in Bosnia.

She paid \$1,000 to attend a Republican fund-raiser attended by President Bush in 2001. The year before, she filed bankruptcy papers that listed her monthly income as \$1,123.

She had a brush of local notoriety in 1995 when, as president of the Fresno-based Women International Network, she promoted an appearance by Mike Tyson at a fund-raiser. Tyson said he had never been contacted.

On a first meeting, when a reporter offered a handshake, Khadijah Ghafur instead gave an embrace. "I'm the hugging type," she said.

She said she founded Baladullah and the charter school as a way for people to nourish "the empowerment of the human spirit."

"The real sensational story is that some people are living on a ranch together, and they're learning to feel they can accomplish things," she said. "And there's a school that is reaching out to parents and children who had fallen through the cracks. Once people gain hope, they can do anything."

Khadijah Ghafur is expansive in telling of her childhood brushes with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., her journey to Islam, her views on education. But she

will not discuss what money bought the Baladullah lands or details of the charter school's finances that are being investigated by federal, state and local authorities.

Officials for the Fresno Unified School District said they expect to yank GateWay's charter this month, citing concerns over \$1.3 million of debt and what they deemed questionable budgeting.

Khadijah Ghafur doesn't think she should be grilled.

"This is where it lies. I'm not a terrorist. I'm not connected to any terrorist organization. Why should I be asked so many questions? Why should the people at Baladullah be put on trial?"

But even as the call for prayer goes out five times a day over a peaceful slice of the Sierra, the clamor surrounding Baladullah continues.

Ties from an alleged murderer and an accused gun trafficker intersect at these gates. The community bears at least a superficial resemblance to those that authorities have labeled extremist sects.

As the families behind these gates feed chickens, water olive trees and educate their children, two questions shadow Baladullah: Do terrorists live here? Or are innocent people being hounded because of such fears?

On a December afternoon, Baladullah residents invited their neighbors for a luncheon. The neighbors came. So did Tulare County sheriff's Lt. Greg Langford.

He sipped tea and talked sports. He was there not to investigate, but to offer support.

Last month, Langford and two other deputies brought teddy bears and blankets to Baladullah's children.

If there are undercover investigations of Baladullah, Langford said they're not through his department. He said he has free access to Baladullah and always has been welcomed onto the property. He said he's more afraid for the people of Baladullah than of them.

"They've been pointed to as terrorists, and they're scared someone is going to hurt them," Langford said.

"I'm not so naive as to think I can say with 100% certainty nothing is going on up there. Maybe they have Osama [bin Laden] hidden in a closet. But I can only go on what I know, and I know that the biggest problem we have up here is cows on the road. I know I have scared children who live here, and I know it's my job to protect them."

The reporter can be reached at dmarcum@fresnobee.com or 441-6375.

Ex. 24 - P. 6

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Fresno Bee, The (CA) Published January 6, 2002 Section: MAIN NEWS
Page A1

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1-10-02

Source: [News & Business](#) > [News](#) > [Major Newspapers](#) ⓘ

Terms: (("muslims of the americas" or "muslims of america")) and (gateway or "al fuqra" or ghafur) and date geq (04/23/1998) ([Edit Search](#))

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San Jose Mercury News (California) January 10, 2002 Thursday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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San Jose Mercury News (California)

January 10, 2002 Thursday MORNING FINAL EDITION

SECTION: FRONT; Pg. 8A

LENGTH: 749 words

HEADLINE: MUSLIMS OF THE AMERICAS DENIES LINKS TO TERROR GROUPS;
LEADERS SAY MEMBERS SUPPORT U.S. GOVERNMENT AND ARE 'PEACE LOVERS'

BYLINE: JIM PUZZANGHERA, Mercury News Washington Bureau

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

Muslims of the Americas, a group whose religious communities in rural areas such as the Sierra foothills have drawn law enforcement scrutiny since Sept. 11, has no connection to terrorist organizations, leaders of the group said Wednesday.

"We are not involved in any illegal acts of terrorism or otherwise, and we want to put a stop to the associations," said Suhir Ahmad, chief editor of the Islamic Post, the group's newspaper, and deputy director of the Washington, D.C., campus of the group's International Qur'anic Open University.

"We are American citizens. We abide by the Constitution. We do support our government, and we are peace lovers. We want peace."

A spokesman said the group decided to hold its news conference Wednesday to respond to recent news accounts that have quoted law enforcement officials as saying the group's spiritual leader is the founder of a violent extremist group.

Federal authorities have been investigating ties between **Muslims of the Americas** and Jamaat **Al-Fuqra**, a violent sect that the U.S. State Department has described as a terrorist group. Among the small communities and schools operated by **Muslims of the Americas** is Baladullah, outside of Fresno. Federal authorities are investigating two incidents involving residents of Baladullah, one charged with killing a Fresno County sheriff's deputy in August and another accused of smuggling firearms between South Carolina and New York.

While some members of **Muslims of the Americas** might get into legal trouble, there is no plot against the U.S. government or connection with any terrorist organization, group officials said at a Washington news conference.

"These situations that have happened in California or wherever else are the acts of the individuals and not the acts of the community," said Muhammad Hasseeb Haqq, the national spokesman for **Muslims of the Americas**.

EXHIBIT 26

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"People come from all walks of life prior to being Muslim. Therefore it's hard to let go of their old ways. . . . Because someone commits a criminal act it does not mean that this is an act of **Muslims of the Americas.**"

The group was founded by Sheik Mubarak Ali Jilani, a Pakistani cleric. It set up communities in rural areas to allow Muslims to escape the violence of inner cities. But the State Department's 1999 global terrorism report also says that Jilani founded **Jamaat Al-Fuqra**, which it describes as an "Islamic sect that seeks to purify Islam through violence." The report said the group committed attacks during the 1980s, including assassinations and firebombings across the United States, and that some of its members have been convicted of crimes such as murder and fraud.

Al-Fuqra did not appear in the State Department's most recent terrorism report, in 2000, and Wednesday officials with **Muslims of the Americas** said that meant **Al-Fuqra** was no longer considered a terrorist group. But the State Department has made no such determination, an official said. Aside from listing the 30 groups that qualify as "foreign terrorist organizations" under U.S. law -- a standard that many terrorist groups don't meet -- the State Department includes in its annual report only other groups that have been active in that year.

Officials of **Muslims of the Americas** said that while Jilani has referred to **Al-Fuqra**, it is a generic term in Islam and that they had no knowledge of **Al-Fuqra's** existence.

The Anti-Defamation League disputes that.

"All the evidence that we have seen indicates that these two organizations are closely related," said Jordan Kessler, a senior researcher with the group, which fights anti-Semitism and bigotry.

But representatives of **Muslims of the Americas** said groups and people opposed to the Islamic religion are simply trying to hurt their group by making the terrorist claims. The Baladullah community had taken down a sign at its entrance indicating the affiliation with the International Qur'anic Open University, because of fear of recriminations triggered by recent negative publicity the group has received. The sign was recently reposted, Haqq said.

"We moved to these rural areas to take our families out of the decadence and immorality they found in the inner cities," Haqq said. "Our enemies or the enemies of Islam have referred to our campuses and our villages as compounds or terrorist training camps. . . . We're just trying to develop a community that's self-sufficient, where we could educate our children and have a safe secure environment."

GRAPHIC: Photo;

PHOTO: OZIER MUHAMMAD -- NEW YORK TIMES

Scrutiny by U.S. law enforcement is now high for Muslim religious communities and campuses in rural areas, including the Islamberg campus of Qur'anic Open University in western Virginia, above.

LOAD-DATE: January 11, 2002

Source: [News & Business > News > Major Newspapers](#) ⓘ

Terms: ("muslims of the americas" or "muslims of america") and (gateway or "al fuqra" or ghafur) and date geq (04/23/1998) ([Edit Search](#))

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Date/Time: Wednesday, April 23, 2003 - 2:09 PM EDT

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2-2-02

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San Jose Mercury News (California) February 2, 2002 Saturday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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San Jose Mercury News (California)

February 2, 2002 Saturday MORNING FINAL EDITION

SECTION: FRONT; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 1353 words

HEADLINE: U.S. FOCUSES ATTENTION ON RURAL MUSLIM GROUP;
FIGURE IN PAKISTAN LINKED TO KIDNAPPING

BYLINE: BRANDON BAILEY AND SEAN WEBBY, Mercury News

BODY:

For nearly 20 years, members of an African-American Muslim group have sought refuge in a series of rural California sanctuaries, saying they want to pursue their religion in peace.

But the group has its roots in a militant international Islamic movement that federal agents have been tracking for years. Members in California have settled in the Sierra Nevada foothills east of Fresno.

Today, the leader of that movement is at the center of the kidnapping of an American reporter in Pakistan. The case has focused new attention on the followers of Sheik Mubarik Ali Gilani, a once-obscure and still-shadowy religious figure who authorities have linked to Muslim extremists and terrorism in the United States and overseas.

It was Gilani whom Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl apparently was trying to meet in Karachi last week, when he was abducted. His captors have warned they will kill him if their demands are not met. They have also threatened to kill other Americans in Pakistan.

Gilani (sometimes spelled Jilani) is being held and questioned by Pakistani police and FBI agents. The Mercury News has learned that he was located after U.S. authorities provided information gleaned from communications between Gilani's office in Pakistan and a community of Gilani followers in Virginia.

A senior police officer in Lahore, Pakistan, told the Mercury News that the cleric had received "a huge amount of money" from California.

U.S. authorities have not reported that Gilani's American followers are currently involved in terrorism. But as part of a nationwide reassessment of potential threats since Sept. 11, the FBI is re-examining the group's history and activities, a law enforcement source said.

That includes taking another hard look at the community outside Fresno known as Baladullah. Members of Baladullah have denied a formal relationship with Gilani. It's not clear that everyone living at Baladullah is a Gilani follower. But some have a 20-year history of ties to Gilani followers in this country.

Their story stretches back to the Los Angeles inner-city neighborhood of Compton, extends through several remote locations in rural California and includes a time when Baladullah's founder, Khadijah **Ghafur**, was married to a man who authorities described as the leader of Gilani's movement on the West Coast, according to law enforcement sources and public records.

Representatives for Gilani's U.S. movement say they are law-abiding citizens whose New York-based organization is called **Muslims of the Americas** and includes several hundred adherents living in rural communities across the country.

U.S. authorities say at least some of Gilani's followers are part of a violent network called Ul-Fuqra, involved in fraud and numerous acts of violence, including bombings and murder.

Most of those attacks targeted religious rivals and took place in the 1980s and early 1990s. But even in the past year, authorities have brought federal firearms charges against some Gilani followers.

Separately, state and local authorities are investigating the possible misuse of public funds by a Fresno charter school that is run by Baladullah founder **Ghafur**.

Representatives for **Muslims of the Americas** say they are being targeted because of racism and anti-Muslim prejudice. They and members of the Baladullah community refused repeated requests to comment for this article.

But official documents, law enforcement reports and experts paint an intriguing and contradictory picture of the organization and its leader Gilani.

Man of contrasts

The contradictions begin with Gilani himself.

Followers say Gilani is a respected Islamic teacher who sponsors charitable work in the troubled Muslim region of Kashmir. About 60, he has three wives -- two of them American-born. He lives in the northern Pakistani city of Lahore, where he operates a school called the International Qur'anic Open University and teaches a form of Sufi mysticism and a religious therapy called Koranic psychiatry.

Some Islamic scholars dismiss him as a minor cleric with a harmless following. But Pakistani authorities say that he has run training camps there for Islamist guerrilla fighters and that he has served as an emissary between Osama bin Laden and supporters in Saudi Arabia. Recent news reports have said that he may be linked to alleged shoe bomber Richard Reid.

Reports from Pakistan this week have linked Gilani both to Muslim extremists and Indian government officials -- two groups that are fundamentally at odds.

The U.S. State Department listed him on a 1999 roster of international terrorists.

And while Gilani is not considered part of Al-Qaida, U.S. authorities say that bin Laden lieutenant Wadi el-Hage helped some of Gilani's followers assassinate a Muslim cleric in Arizona in 1990. El-Hage is now serving a life prison term for his part in the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa.

Other Gilani followers have been implicated in at least 17 bombings and assassinations in the United States -- targeting Jews, Hindus and even fellow Muslims who apparently were considered rivals or dissenters, according to

court testimony by Thomas Gallagher, an agent with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

In 1993, a group of Gilani followers in Colorado were convicted of a wide-ranging conspiracy that included defrauding the state of workers-compensation funds and plotting the Arizona cleric's murder. The complex investigation began four years earlier, when authorities searched a storage locker and found firearms, explosives, phony identification papers and plans for arson and murder.

But in recent years, some scholars suggest that Gilani's followers may have outgrown their militant roots. One analyst believes they simply shifted their focus -- to fundraising -- after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

"They knew they were being watched," suggested Yehudit Barsky, who tracks international terrorist groups for the American Jewish Committee.

A primary investigator in the Colorado case, Susan Fenger, said she traced at least \$20,000 in state funds that Gilani's followers in Colorado Springs sent to his home base in Lahore.

Earlier this month, **Muslims of the Americas** representatives held a news conference to protest what they saw as a long-running smear campaign by U.S. officials and the news media.

"We can assure the United States government and all others concerned that the **Muslims of the Americas** has no sinister or evil designs against the United States nor any other group," they said. "Our sheik does not condone nor teaches us to condone violence, especially against the innocent."

A statement on the **Muslims of the Americas** Web site, which was recently taken offline, charged that a "Zionist conspiracy" has manipulated the U.S. government and orchestrated a campaign against Gilani and Islam as a whole.

American roots

Gilani first came to America around 1980 and began building a following in New York City.

It was a time when a number of African-Americans were discovering Islam as a source of both spiritual and social enlightenment.

"It's a great alternative to oppression and racism," said Yvonne Haddad, a Georgetown University scholar who has written books on the spread of Islam in the United States.

As he attracted more followers around the United States, they established a network of rural enclaves -- in places such as Colorado, Virginia, South Carolina and upstate New York -- where they live in relatively spartan conditions, not unlike those of Baladullah.

Religious scholars say that's consistent with the principles of Sufism, a branch of Islam that emphasizes an inner struggle for enlightenment, while renouncing worldly concerns and material wealth.

Today, of course, there are many branches of Islam in the United States, as practiced by African-Americans and others. Scholars say Gilani's movement is a small faction, with several hundred followers. It is not associated with the Nation of Islam movement, whose leaders have included Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan.

NOTES: RELATED STORY: Page 1A, 20A

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Mercury News Staff Writer Michael Dorgan contributed to this report.

GRAPHIC: Photo, Map;

MAP: MERCURY NEWS

Rural enclaves

Source: Mercury News research

PHOTO: LINDSEY NAIR -- ROANOKE (VA.) TIMES ARCHIVES

One group of followers of Sheik Mubarik Ali Gilani lived at this compound in Charlotte County, Va.

LOAD-DATE: February 4, 2002

Source: [News & Business](#) > [News](#) > [Major Newspapers](#) ①

Terms: (("muslims of the americas" or "muslims of america")) and (gateway or "al fuqra" or ghafur) and date geq (04/23/1998) ([Edit Search](#))

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EX. 29 - P 4

AA 212

Source: [News & Business](#) > [News](#) > Magazine Stories, Combined ①

Terms: "muslims of america" or "muslims of the americas" and date geq (04/23/1993) ([Edit Search](#))

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Newsweek, February 28, 1994

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February 28, 1994 , UNITED STATES EDITION

SECTION: NATIONAL AFFAIRS; Al-Fuqra; Pg. 30

LENGTH: 1067 words

HEADLINE: Another Holy War, Waged on American Soil
A Muslim sect with a dangerous agenda

BYLINE: MARK HOSENBALL in Washington

BODY:

MUSLIMS ARE NOT TERRORISTS!" shouts the headline in a January 1992 edition of Insight, the newspaper published by a group called **Muslims of the Americas** from its remote encampment in upstate New York. But the accompanying article adds a menacing caveat. "Simply said, a Muslim must fight in defense of Al-Islam, his life and property against the oppressor or transgressor . . . Remember, 'Tumult and Oppression are worse than slaughter'."

Federal investigators know Muslims of the Americas by another name: "Al-Fuqra," Arabic for "the impoverished." Once written off as an inconsequential splinter group, Al-Fuqra is now considered perhaps the most dangerous fundamentalist sect operating in the United States. Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, alleged to be the spiritual inspiration for the World Trade Center bombing, may be the most notorious Islamic cleric on American soil. But Al-Fuqra and its Pakistani founder, Sheik Mubarak Shah Jilani, have perpetrated for more havoc. Law-enforcement officials say they are responsible for a decade-long string of assassinations and bombings in the name of Islamic purity.

Enemies list: Al-Fuqra's actual agenda is murky. Jilani and his estimated 3,000 U.S. followers -- mostly African-American Muslims -- profess a lengthy and wide-ranging list of enemies. The roster of transgressors includes Hindus and Hare Krishnas, Israel, the Jewish Defense League and even the Nation of Islam. The sect emerged in the early 1980s, as Jilani built a following in a Brooklyn mosque, mixing charismatic fundamentalism with calls for young men to join Afghan guerrillas in their fight against the Soviet Union. But investigators say Jilani's disciples also waged holy war on American soil. An alleged Al-Fuqra leader, Stephen Paster, blew off most of one hand preparing explosives for the July 1983 firebombing of a Portland, Ore., hotel owned by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the late Indian guru. He served four years in prison for the attack. Later that summer the leader of a small Detroit Muslim sect was shot to death. Authorities say his assailants were Al-Fuqra members who died in a subsequent firebombing of the sect's headquarters.

The group's violent past spilled into full view when Colorado Springs police raided a storage locker in 1989. They found a cache of firearms, grenades, plastic explosives and target-practice silhouettes labeled ZIONIST PIG and FBI ANTI-TERRORIST TEAM. Investigators also recovered Al-Fuqra documents linking the group to a pattern of mayhem, including the 1984 firebombings of Hare Krishna temples in Philadelphia and Denver and plans for the murder of

Imam Rashid Khalifa, a Tucson, Ariz., cleric who preached that the Koran was written by a man, not Allah. One hand-written passage advises that Khalifa be executed "in the quietest method feasible: knife, garrotte . . ." to ward off police. The notes add that anyone who happened onto the crime scene before Khalifa arrived would meet the same fate. "As we wait, everyone who comes must be eliminated . . ." Khalifa was warned, but was stabbed to death four months later as prescribed in the documents. Last October a Colorado Springs jury convicted James Williams, a sect member, of conspiracy in the murder.

Canadian authorities began to take Al-Fuqra seriously in 1991, when five alleged followers were arrested on charges of conspiring to blow up a Toronto Indian theater and Hindu temple. Evidence in the 1993 trial included a video entitled "Soldier of Allah." It features Sheik Jilani exhorting oppressed Muslims around the world to defend themselves. Three of the defendants, convicted of conspiracy to endanger life, denied any link to the sect. But Jilani told a journalist at a radical Islamic summit in Khartoum last year that one of the convicted defendants and two who were acquitted had studied with him in Pakistan.

Investigators have also linked Clement Rodney Hampton-El, a Brooklyn man named in news reports as an Al-Fuqra member, to last year's World Trade Center bombing conspiracy. They say he bragged to a federal informant about testing dynamite used in the blast. Hampton-El, an Afghan-war veteran, was never charged in the case, and his lawyer says he has no relationship with Al-Fuqra. Last June he was one of eight suspects arrested in an alleged terrorist plot to destroy other New York sites.

Jilani disavows any connection to the violence and denies the existence of any group called Al-Fuqra. He says he is a scholar who tries to instill Islamic discipline in the young men who enroll in the branches of his Koranic-Open University in Lahore, Pakistan; upstate New York, and at least three other sites in the United States. "Once they join our university, they become real good citizens," he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation earlier this month. "They stop smoking; they stop stealing; they stop living on welfare. This is what I teach them."

Clandestine warriors: But intelligence sources say Sheik Jilani's mentoring of young Muslims includes terrorist training. In 1992 the CIA began receiving reports that he had established a camp for Islamic militants in Sudan, now controlled by a radical Muslim regime. The agency also established that Jilani was well connected inside ISI, Pakistan's intelligence service. U.S. analysts suspect that Pakistan was using the sheik's recruits as clandestine warriors in terrorist actions against Indian targets. Shortly before leaving office, the Bush administration warned the Pakistani government that it would be listed as a terrorist-sponsor state unless it purged ISI. Sources say that Jilani's inside connections were dismissed as a result.

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head -
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Al-Fuqra's targets to date have been confined largely to rival religious factions. But terrorism analysts say their zeal poses a wider threat to the public safety. The end of the cold war, and the resulting surge in nationalist violence overseas, has emboldened groups like Al-Fuqra. Are they a general danger? "Yes, to the extent that they're violent and that they're fanatics," says David Long, a former State Department counterterrorism expert. At **Muslims of the Americas** headquarters in Hancock, N.Y., a man named Mr. Haqq who answered the phone said only that the police and press have routinely distorted the group's views. But Haqq's protests are belied by a lengthening trail of blood.

GRAPHIC: Pictures 1 and 2, A TRAIL OF BLOOD: Paster being examined by his wife in the hospital after he wounded his hand assembling pipe bombs for a 1993 attack on the Hotel Rajneesh in Portland, Ore. he went to prison for his role in the bombing. Sheik Jilani, Al-Fuqra's spiritual leader, in a camouflage flakjacket, as he appears on a video confiscated from one of his followers in Colorado. COLORADO-DEPT. OF LABOR & EMPLOYMENT, INVESTIGATIONS AND CRIMINAL ENFORCEMENT SECTION, KRAIG SCATTARELLA -- OREGONIAN

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