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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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May 19, 2010

The Honorable Martha N. Johnson  
Administrator  
U.S. General Services Administration  
1800 F Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20405

Dear Administrator Johnson:

I am writing to state my concern that the General Services Administration (GSA) failed to vet a contracting partner prior to entering into a lease agreement. Leading up to the 2010 Census, GSA leased hundreds of offices around the country on behalf of the U.S. Department of Commerce to provide work space for census takers as they count the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> GSA's Public Buildings Service took the lead in helping the Census Bureau find office space.<sup>2</sup> A lease for office space with the with the Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center in Falls Church, Virginia reportedly commits the United States government to spend \$582,000, or about \$23,000 per month, to lease space from November 2008 through the end of this year.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to other controversies, Dar Al-Hijrah has been publicly linked by investigators to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and Fort Hood. Because GSA committed the United States Government to make monthly rent payments to an entity with links to individual terrorists and terrorist organizations, I am specifically concerned that it appears there are insufficient procedures in place to vet potential contract partners.

Dar Al-Hijrah is not listed in GSA's database of individuals and entities that have been suspended or debarred from contracting with the United States Government (the "Excluded Parties List"). Still, GSA and the U.S. Census Bureau should have quickly and easily identified Dar Al-Hijrah as an entity unsuitable for receiving monthly cash payments. Dar Al-Hijrah is well-known to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

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<sup>1</sup> GSA website, "GSA Lends a Hand for the 2010 Census," Apr. 4, 2010, available at [http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?contentType=GSA\\_BASIC&contentId=29589](http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?contentType=GSA_BASIC&contentId=29589) (last visited May 19, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Investigative Project on Terrorism, "Government Pays Mosque it Considers Radical," May 10, 2010.

The DHS maintains the Traveler Enforcement Compliance System (TECS), a database and case management application populated by reports from border and law enforcement agencies. The searchable TECS database allows investigators to quickly identify individuals and entities with derogatory background information.

The Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center is described in one TECS report as having been “under numerous investigations for financing and [providing] aid and comfort to bad [organizations] and members.”<sup>4</sup> In another TECS report, Dar Al-Hijrah is described as “a mosque operating as a front for Hamas operatives in [the] U.S.”<sup>5</sup>

Even the most cursory review using publicly available research tools would have raised red flags when GSA considered entering into a lease with Dar Al-Hijrah. Internet search engines provide a trove of information about the Islamic Center’s links to terrorism that should have led GSA to request a more thorough background check from the Federal Protective Service (FPS).<sup>6</sup> FPS is a federal law enforcement agency that provides security services to federally owned and leased buildings, facilities, properties and other assets.<sup>7</sup> Upon request, FPS will conduct background checks to ensure the safety of facilities leased by the General Services Administration.<sup>8</sup>

There was ample opportunity for GSA to investigate its landlord. Fairfax County property records indicate that Dar Al-Hijrah purchased the 40,000-square-foot building in which the leased office space is located for \$5.8 million on May 23, 2008.<sup>9</sup> The lease did

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<sup>4</sup> “TECS II Report,” Subject: Dar-Al Hijrah Islamic Center, Dec. 12, 2007, available at <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/368.pdf> (last visited May 19, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> “TECS II Report,” Subject: Dar-Al Hijrah Islamic Center, Aug. 28, 2002, available at <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/369.pdf> (last visited May 19, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> A google search for the term “Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center” provides immediate links to the following articles: Caryle Murphy, *Facing New Realities as Islamic Americans*, Wash. Post, Sept. 12, 2004 at A1; Philip Sherwell and Alex Spillius, *Fort Hood Shooting: Texas Army killer linked to Sept. 11 Attacks*, London Telegraph, Nov. 7, 2009 (Nidal Malik Hasan, the sole suspect in the November 5, 2009, Fort Hood shootings, attended the Dar Al-Hijrah mosque at the same time in 2001 as Nawaf al-Hazmi and Hani Hanjour (two of the September 11 hijackers), who attended the mosque for several weeks during 2001). Joint Report of the H. Comm. on Intelligence and the S. Comm. on Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001*, Dec. 20, 2002 (The phone number for Dar Al-Hijrah was found in the Hamburg, Germany, apartment of one of the planners of the September 11 attacks, Ramzi Binalshibh). Eric Lichtblau, *American Accused in a Plot to Assassinate Bush*, N.Y. Times, Feb. 23, 2005 (Ahmed Omar Abu Ali, who was convicted of providing material support to al Qaeda and conspiracy to assassinate President George W. Bush, worshiped and taught Islamic studies at Dar Al-Hijrah, where he was also a camp counselor). Dan Eggen and Jerry Markon, *Justice Dept. Targets U.S. Fundraising for Militant Group*, Wash. Post, Aug. 21, 2004 at A1 (Abelhaleem Hasan Abdelraziq Ashqar, a member of the mosque’s Executive Committee, was convicted in November 2007 of contempt and obstruction of justice for refusal to testify before a grand jury with regard to Hamas, and sentenced to 135 months in prison).

<sup>7</sup> DHS website, “About the FPS,” available at [http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/structure/gc\\_1253889058003.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/structure/gc_1253889058003.shtm) (last visited May 19, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Fairfax County Property Records, “6408 Edsall Road,” available at <http://icare.fairfaxcounty.gov/Forms/Datalets.aspx?mode=profileall&taxyear=2011&ownseq=1&roll=REAL&jur=000&sIndex=1&idx=1&pin=&card=1&item=1&State=1&items=-1> (last visited May 19, 2010).

not go into effect until November 2008.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau officially opened its office in the Dar Al-Hijrah building in February 2009.<sup>11</sup>

If it is the case that GSA contracted with Dar Al-Hijrah because the TECS database is not available to its contracting officers, then that is evidence of an alarming inter-agency communication failure. If GSA entered into a lease agreement with Dar Al-Hijrah without conducting even basic due diligence measures such as an FPS background check or internet search, there may be an even more problematic systemic issue.

To allow me to better understand this apparent failure to ensure that the contracting partners of the United States Government are not linked to terrorism, please provide responses to the following:

1. Was GSA aware of records or information linking Dar Al-Hijrah to terrorist activities or organizations when it entered into a lease agreement with the Islamic Center?
2. Does GSA coordinate the Excluded Parties List with databases such as the Traveler Enforcement Compliance System (TECS) and other databases maintained by DHS to prevent contracts with entities linked to terrorism and other criminal behavior?
3. What vetting procedures did GSA use to conduct due diligence on the Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center prior to entering into a lease agreement with the Islamic Center?
4. Do GSA contracting officials use the Traveler Enforcement Compliance System (TECS) as part of the vetting process?
5. Did GSA request a Federal Protective Service background check of Dar Al-Hijrah prior to entering into a lease agreement with the Islamic Center?
6. Identify any individuals at the General Services Administration, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Department of Homeland Security or the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the U.S. Department of Commerce, or any other federal agency including the Executive Office of the President, who had any role in leasing office space from Dar Al-Hijrah, including but not limited to identifying the leased office space, vetting the potential landlord, and meeting with Dar Al-Hijrah officials.

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<sup>10</sup> Investigative Project on Terrorism, "Government Pays Mosque it Considers Radical," May 10, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bergin, "2010 Census to Bring 3,000 Jobs to Northern Virginia and Alexandria," Feb. 1, 2009, available at <http://gwslepthere.com/2009/02/01/2010-census-to-bring-3000-new-jobs-to-northern-virginia-and-alexandria/> (last visited May 19, 2010).

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7. Provide a timeline of events detailing how GSA came to contractually bind the United States Government to pay rent to Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center. The timeline should include, but not be limited to, the dates of any due diligence efforts, the dates of meetings with Dar Al-Hijrah officials, and the dates of signing of any agreements related to the lease.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please provide responses to the above questions no later than May 28, 2010. This investigation is being conducted in accordance with the Committee's role as the principal oversight committee in the House of Representatives under the broad jurisdiction set forth in House Rule X. If you have any questions about this request, please contact John Cuaderes or Jonathan Skladany of the Committee Staff at 202-225-5074.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Edolphus Towns, Chairman