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Body

Federal immigration authorities are attempting to strip the U.S. citizenship of a Richardson businessman who served as an official of two Palestinian organizations accused of having ties to the Hamas terrorist group.

Rasmi Khader Almallah, the 46-year-old president of Carpet Mills of America, is accused in a civil complaint filed in Dallas federal court last week of obtaining his citizenship in 1988 through a sham marriage seven years earlier.

Mr. Almallah has not been accused of any crime. Neither he nor Khalid Hamideh, a Garland attorney who has represented him in previous business disputes, could be reached for comment Wednesday.

The complaint served on Mr. Almallah on Monday represents the latest attempt by a federal terrorism task force to prosecute or deport employees or officials of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development. Seven of the foundation's officers were indicted by a federal grand jury in July on charges they funneled millions of dollars to Hamas.

Mr. Almallah was listed in tax records as a board member of the Richardson charity, which was closed in December 2001 after the Bush administration declared it a financial arm of Hamas, a designated terrorist group.

The complaint against Mr. Almallah relies on a federal law that historically has been used to denaturalize suspected Nazi war criminals. However, the law was used this year in Cleveland against a Muslim cleric who was accused of having terrorist ties.

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Representatives of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. attorney's office said they could not say whether the law had been used in North Texas against someone other than an alleged war criminal.

"I'm not at liberty to discuss why we chose to move for revocation," U.S. Attorney Richard Roper said. "I do, however, believe that those reasons will become evident at the hearing on our motion."

Brian Bates, a partner in a leading Houston law firm that specializes in immigration cases, said that while the Justice Department had become more aggressive since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, he had never heard of using a citizenship law against people suspected of having terrorist ties.

"It's pretty rare because it's hard to do," he said.

Attached to the complaint against Mr. Almallah was an affidavit from Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent Donna Chabot. Ms. Chabot is a member of the North Texas Terrorism Task Force and has participated in several other immigration cases targeting employees or officials of Holy Land Foundation. She could not be reached for comment.

Immigration authorities deported three foundation employees in 2001 for lying to obtain work visas. This year, the government deported a former graphic designer for the foundation for overstaying his student visa.

Mr. Almallah, a native Jordanian of Palestinian descent, is accused of paying Rose Marie Hawley to marry him in December 1981 so that he could obtain permanent residency status. The two never lived together as husband and wife, the complaint alleged.

Court records show Mr. Almallah filed for divorce in October 1982, and the couple was granted an uncontested divorce in January 1983.

Mr. Almallah was awarded citizenship in July 1988 after making false statements about whether he had ever lied to obtain immigration benefits, according to the complaint filed by the U.S. attorney's office in Dallas.

Ms. Hawley, who has a rural address in East Texas, could not be reached for comment Wednesday. She said in a previous interview with The Dallas Morning News that the marriage to Mr. Almallah collapsed because of discord.

Mr. Almallah is a well-known figure in the Muslim community, where he has operated several businesses and has been a driving force behind the creation and expansion of Brighter Horizons, the area's largest Muslim school.

Carpet Mills of America, which he founded in 1989, has grown into a chain of 40 stores in Dallas, Houston, Austin, and a handful of cities in Arizona and Florida.

He and his second wife and children live in a 5,134-square-foot, six-bedroom home in Richardson, valued by the Dallas County Appraisal District at \$568,450. The house is a few blocks south of the Dallas Central Mosque.

In 1992, Mr. Almallah was listed in incorporation records as secretary for the Islamic Association for Palestine, a self-styled information clearinghouse that had just relocated to Richardson from Tucson, Ariz.

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Immigration authorities have accused the association, like Holy Land Foundation, of being linked to Hamas. But unlike the charity, the Islamic Association for Palestine has not been closed by the government or had its officers charged with any crimes.

One of Mr. Almallah's previous businesses, a Sonic drive-in restaurant in North Dallas, was caught up in the federal investigation of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

An employee of the restaurant, Eyad Ismail, was convicted in 1997 of driving an explosives-laden van that blew up under the twin towers, killing six and injuring more than 1,000 others.

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