

## **Federal agents raid Net business - Terrorism task force seeking computer data; Company says it has nothing to hide**

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**RICHARDSON** - A federal terrorism task force began searching the office of an Internet services company on Wednesday in what federal officials said was the largest raid in the North Texas-based operation's six-year history.

Agents of the FBI, Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service and several other federal agencies conducted the early- morning raid at InfoCom Corp., just south of Arapaho Road at 630 International Parkway.

FBI spokeswoman Lori Bailey said agents were primarily searching for computerized information and could require up to two days to complete their work.

InfoCom's owner, Bayan Elashi, and an attorney for the company said they were not told what agents were looking for, but they said that the business is not involved in terrorism or any other criminal activity.

"We want to cooperate. We have nothing to hide. We are a clean organization," said attorney Mark Enoch, who said he began representing InfoCom after the raid began.

The warrant and supporting materials were sealed by U.S. Magistrate Judge Paul Stickney of Dallas. Federal agents declined to comment on the motive for the raid.

A news release said the search was one aspect of an ongoing, two- year investigation by the North Texas Joint Terrorism Task Force. More than 80 law officers were involved in various aspects of the operation, Agent Bailey said.

One of the agencies listed as participating in the investigation of InfoCom is the Office of Foreign Assets Control, an arm of the Treasury Department empowered to freeze or seize the assets of individuals or organizations that have been designated by the government as terrorist.

Federal agents appeared to be copying information from computer hard drives, Mr. Enoch said, and had cut off Internet service to the company's 500 clients.

Mr. Elashi said he suspected his business was targeted because he is Palestinian.

He said he stood to lose millions of dollars because of disruptions in service.

○ InfoCom has close ties to the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, which describes itself as the nation's largest Muslim charity.

X InfoCom, which was incorporated in Texas in 1992, is a privately held company that describes itself as a seller of computer systems and Internet services to clients in the United States and abroad. Its clients include many of the nation's largest Islamic organizations, as well as businesses in the Middle East.

Dun & Bradstreet stated that as of January, InfoCom reported annual sales of \$7 million. Mr. Enoch said the company had nine full-time and five part-time employees.

InfoCom's offices are located directly across from the headquarters of Holy Land Foundation. During the raid, InfoCom employees relocated to the foundation's offices to try to continue their business, Mr. Enoch said.

Mr. Enoch, whose law firm also has represented Holy Land Foundation, said that the raid had no connection to the foundation.

"Holy Land Foundation is not the story of the day. It's InfoCom," he said.

○ Holy Land Foundation, which is also one of InfoCom's clients, has itself been under federal investigation for alleged ties to Hamas and has been outlawed in Israel, where Hamas has been blamed for scores of deaths in terrorist attacks.

No criminal charges have ever been filed against the foundation or any of its employees or associates in the United States.

Mr. Enoch said the foundation provides humanitarian aid in the Middle East and elsewhere.

"We don't want to be associated with terrorism, and we're not," he said.

The ties between InfoCom and Holy Land Foundation extend beyond a business relationship. Ghassan Elashi, InfoCom's vice president for sales and marketing, is a co-founder of the foundation and serves as its board chairman. Mr. Elashi was present Wednesday but declined to be interviewed.

His brother, Bayan, the president and chief executive officer of InfoCom, is listed in Internet registry records as the technical contact for the Web site of Holy Land Foundation.

○ The Elashis moved to Richardson and incorporated InfoCom at about the same time Holy Land Foundation also relocated from the Los Angeles area.

The Elashi brothers have family and financial ties to Mousa Abu Marzook. Mr. Marzook's wife, Nadia, is a cousin of the Elashi brothers. In 1993, Mrs. Marzook invested \$250,000 in InfoCom and receives a monthly annuity from the company, said Stanley Cohen, a New York attorney for Mr. Marzook.

Israeli officials said that while living in the United States, Mr. Marzook established an extensive fund-raising operation for Hamas. Israel has urged the U.S. government to shut down the network. Mr. Marzook has denied the allegations made by Israeli officials.

Since U.S. law was changed in 1996 to ban fund raising for Hamas, there have been two federal grand jury investigations in New York and Chicago. Two associates of Mr. Marzook were jailed for refusing to testify.

There was also a high-profile investigation into allegations of ties between Hamas, Islamic Jihad and an Islamic think tank in Tampa, Fla., which has produced no indictments after almost six years.

Leaders in the Dallas-area Muslim community said the raid on InfoCom caught them by surprise and caused them some concern about the purpose of the action.

Mohammed Elmougy, North Texas president of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said he supported the right of the FBI to investigate wrongdoing. But if nothing comes of the investigation, it might raise questions, he said.

"If there is nothing wrong, that would cause us as a community to believe that some of these decisions are very politically motivated by things that are going on in the Middle East," he said. "If there is wrongdoing, we have laws in this country to deal with that. We believe in the law."

Staff writer Jeffrey Weiss contributed to this report.

Illustrations/Photos: PHOTO(S): (RICHARD MICHAEL PRUITT/Staff Photographer)  
A terrorism task force, including agents of the FBI, Customs Service and Immigration and Naturalization Service, conducted a morning raid Wednesday at InfoCom Corp. in Richardson.