

## **Ex-Islamic group member leaves U.S.**

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### **Body**

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A participant in a controversial Islamic studies group once connected to the University of South Florida was told to leave the country this week.

Basheer Nafi had been charged with immigration fraud, but the charge was dropped, a senior spokesman for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service said Wednesday.

Nafi did not contest a lesser, non-criminal violation of his visa status, and he was allowed to leave the country under threat of deportation, INS spokesman Russ Bergeron said.

USFWISE

Nafi and his family had planned to leave the country anyway, said his wife, Imelda Ryan, who remains in this country. The couple had sold their furniture and purchased airplane tickets to Britain. They are British subjects, she said.

Since Nafi had previously notified immigration officials of his intentions, Ryan believes her husband's arrest last week outside his office in suburban Washington, D.C., was simple harassment. "We feel they're bringing false accusations in order to discredit WISE," she said.

WISE is an acronym for the World and Islam Studies Group, a private think tank in Tampa that co-sponsored scholarly forums and other activities with USF until last year.

A former WISE administrator and part-time USF professor, Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, later emerged in Syria as the new leader of a Palestinian terror group, Islamic Jihad.

Soon after that, FBI and federal immigration agents announced that they were investigating the group and one of its founders, USF engineering professor Sami Al-Arian.

Ryan and other Muslim supporters complain that federal agents and others have been smearing WISE and its other officials, including Nafi, without any formal charges being filed.

Some critics of the INS, including Georgetown University law professor David Cole, say the INS selectively enforces minor immigration rules in order to deport people whose politics are deemed unsavory in the United States.

Cole said he was not familiar with Nafi's case, but in general, "with Palestinians, the federal government has shown a failure to differentiate between support for terrorism, which should be punished, and support for political

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organizations that the administration does not like, which is constitutionally protected activity under the First Amendment."

A federal affidavit filed in Tampa last year cited a Jordanian newspaper article and a confidential source in identifying Nafi as a leader in Islamic Jihad, an accusation he denies.

Bergeron denied that there was anything selective about Nafi's arrest or deportation proceedings.

"It is not unusual for the INS to arrest and move to deport individuals who violate the terms of a whole variety of non-immigrant visa restrictions," he said.

The charge that Nafi did not contest stemmed from his changing jobs from WISE to another private think tank, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, near Washington.

Nafi obtained a renewal of his visa in February to reflect his new employer. But in the meantime, he was technically out of compliance with his old visa, which required him to work for WISE, Bergeron said.

After being held in jail, unable to communicate even with his wife, Nafi decided not to contest the charge so that he could leave the country this week as planned, his wife said.

Bergeron said Nafi would have been forcibly deported had he not left on his own.

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