

INS TO RELEASE ANOTHER MUSLIM ACTIVIST AFTER YEARS OF BEING HELD ON 'SECRET EVIDENCE'

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Body

The Immigration and Naturalization Service last week freed a leader of a militant Islamic group in Algeria who had been imprisoned for four years without being told details of the charges against him. Today, another Muslim activist is expected to be released, authorities said.

A spokesman for the INS said the agency decided to release Anwar Haddam, a leader of Algeria's Islamic Action Front, late Thursday. The INS has described Haddam as "a dangerous man," and last week U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno blocked a move to grant him political asylum in the United States.

Haddam had been held on charges based on "secret evidence." Authorities said that, to protect national security, Haddam was not told details of the charges against him.

A spokesman for the INS in Miami said the agency also would release Mazen al Najjar, 43, today after the Board of Immigration Appeals on Monday lifted an order issued last week that blocked his release.

Al Najjar was held in a Florida jail for four years on secret evidence that allegedly suggests he is a terrorist. Authorities charge that al Najjar is connected to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which considers itself engaged in an armed struggle against Israel.

Last week, U.S. Immigration Judge R. Kevin McHugh ordered al Najjar's release on \$8,000 bond, saying the government failed to give him enough information to defend himself.

The secret evidence laws, which have existed since the 1950s, allow immigrants to be detained without being told of the charges against them. After the 1996 Oklahoma City bombing, the secret evidence laws were strengthened. About 20 immigrants, mostly Arab-Americans, are held in U.S. jails without criminal charges on classified evidence.

Haddam, the Algerian group leader, was released even though the INS considers him "a danger to the United States and to national security," INS spokeswoman Maria Cardona said Monday. "He should not be in this country."

But the INS, an agency of the Justice Department, decided to release Haddam under certain conditions because the Board of Immigration Appeals recommended that he be freed, Cardona said. The BIA is the highest administrative body for interpreting and applying immigration laws within the Justice Department and is independent from the INS.

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Cardona said the **INS** believes Haddam should be expelled to Algeria, even though he has been sentenced to death there. He must remain **in** the greater Washington area for the next 45 days while Reno considers the objections of the **INS** to granting him asylum. He also cannot leave the country and must routinely notify the **INS** of his whereabouts.

Haddam had been a lobbyist for Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front **in** the United States until he was detained **in** December 1996. The group, better known by its French acronym FIS, had been a popular political and charitable organization **in** Algeria before it took up arms against the government **in** 1993. Algerian leaders, backed by the military, canceled 1992 parliamentary elections that FIS leaders seemed destined to win, plunging the country into a civil war **in** which an estimated 65,000 people have been killed.

Haddam applied for political asylum **in** the United States **in** 1993, claiming he would be killed if he returned to Algeria. Five **years** later, he was tried **in** absentia **in** Algeria for being a member of the Algerian Jihad Islamic Front, a militant faction of the FIS.

Notes

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Correction

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT (publ. 12/22/00, pg. 2A) An article Dec. 12 **in** the national report about the Immigration and Naturalization Service's **release** of Anwar Haddam, leader of a militant Islamic group, stated that about 20 other people it described as ""Arab Americans" are similarly being **held in** U.S. jails without criminal charges on **secret**, classified **evidence**. **Secret evidence** can be used only against people who are not citizens of the United States, and the article should have made clear that those U.S. detainees are not citizens.

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