RED HERRING SCAPEGOAT?

Topping my personal list of *mondo bizarro* stories this week was the headline in papers all over the country, Ex-Congressman Charged in Terror Case. The story reveals that:

> Former congressman from Michigan Mark Siljander was indicted Wednesday (1/16) as being part of a terrorist fundraising ring that allegedly sent more than $130,000 to an al-Qaeda and Taliban supporter. He's accused of lying about lobbying on behalf of an Islamic charity (The Islamic American Relief Agency or IARA) that was accused of sending funds to terrorists...
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> The government accuses IARA of sending approximately $130,000 to help Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whom the United States has designated a global terrorist. The money, sent to bank accounts in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 2003 and 2004, was masked as donations to an orphanage located in buildings that Hekmatyar owned.
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> Authorities described Hekmatyar as an Afghan mujahedeen leader who participated in and supported terrorist acts by al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The Justice Department said Hekmatyar "has vowed to engage in a holy war against the United States and international troops in Afghanistan."

Nope, no mention of how the CIA gave Gulbuddin the lion's share ($600 million out of $1 billion) of all military aid to the Afghans fighting the Soviets in the 1980s - as you learned long ago in Gulbuddin and the CIA, and again recently in Charlie Wilson and Ronald Reagan's War.

In the latter, I explain how it wasn't just Charlie alone, but a number of Congressmen who passionately supported aid to the Afghans. Among them was Mark Siljander, who served in Congress from 1981 to 1986. I briefed Mark many, many times, and he thoroughly understood the sort of creature Gulbuddin was. As a result, he was constantly berating the CIA for its Gulbuddin obsession.

Admittedly, I have had no contact with him for almost 20 years, but for Mark to be caught in a scam not just with a terrorist fundraising ring, but the terrorist being Gulbuddin, is just off the wall.

One question to ask is: where did the IARA get the $130,000 to send to Gulbuddin?

Turns out the Islamic charity got the money from the US government: USAID, the US Agency for International Development.

The IARA has been under suspicion for a long time. In 2004, it was designated by the Treasury Department as a possible fundraiser for terrorists.

So just what is a US government agency doing giving money to a terrorist funding group? USAID said it was for "relief work in Africa." Oh...

According to friends of mine who still know him, Mark remains a very devout evangelical Christian who has become dedicated to a "healing" between Christians and Moslems. Maybe that's naïve, but nonetheless, this indictment of him sure smells like rotten scapegoat.

Are Feds trying to scapegoat Mark in order to cover up their funding of terrorism? Shouldn't the boys at USAID be at least included in the indictment?

That Gulbuddin is at the bottom of this is a giant red flag. US government support for him is one of the great untold slimy scandals, and the Feds are desperate to keep it untold. The headline-grabbing indictment of a former Congressman - your government at work protecting America from terrorists! - seems the latest cover-up move.

Maybe Mark is guilty as charged. But much more than maybe is that's not the whole story.

Unless the Feds can solidly prove his knowing complicity, the suspicion will grow that Mark Siljander is a Red Herring Scapegoat. The real story, the real place to focus, is the connection between US government agencies and Gulbuddin.