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## Deportation case strains Muslims' relations with police (RECORD - June 7)

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BY HEATHER HADDON

SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

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Members of the Islamic Center of Passaic County say they are rethinking how open they will be to working with law enforcement after watching federal prosecutors try to link their spiritual leader with terrorism during deportation hearings.

In his 12 years at the mosque, Imam Mohammad Qatanani has regularly invited local, state and federal police agencies to speak with his community. But some leaders in the mosque have expressed feelings of betrayal over the hearings that concluded this week.

They also say they're angry that the prosecution doubted the mosque's commitment to transparency with police.

Several members who met at the mosque Friday questioned how much they should collaborate in the future with law enforcement, especially the federal agencies that prompted the deportation case.

"Obviously, we're going to be more selective about who we work with," said Salaheddin Mustafa of Clifton, a member of the mosque and one of Qatanani's closest supporters. "There's clearly a segment of law enforcement that views us as an enemy."

During the imam's four-day trial, which concluded Monday in U.S. Immigration Court in Newark, the prosecution alleged he had associated with supporters of terrorism.

But sheriffs in Bergen and Passaic counties testified that their personal and professional relations with Qatanani trump the charges. They said Qatanani has repeatedly invited police officials to the mosque to aid their investigations, learn about Islam and even hold a job fair.

A spokesman for the FBI in New Jersey, however, downplayed the agency's reliance on Qatanani and his supporters, saying the imam should be deported if he has terrorist connections.

"He's a good guy, but that stuff doesn't get him off the hook," said Special Agent Sean Quinn, an FBI spokesman in Newark. "Whatever the court finds is OK with us. There's a plain logic to this."

Qatanani, 44, a native of Palestine, faces deportation with his family because the government says he failed to disclose a 1993 conviction by an Israeli military court on charges of assisting Hamas. The imam, who denounced the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks two hours after they happened, denies the allegations, saying he never was made aware of any charges.

The imam testified that beginning in 1998, he invited the FBI to the mosque to demystify its work to members. He later asked agents to an interfaith service at the mosque.

After Sept. 11, Passaic County Sheriff Jerry Speziale said he dispatched his counterterrorism detective to the mosque to investigate reports that the 9/11 hijackers lived or passed through Paterson. Speziale testified at Qatanani's hearing that he found no credible links between the hijackers and the Islamic Center of Passaic County, and instead began dispatching police to the mosque to learn about Islamic culture.

But during the trial, the Department of Homeland Security argued that police knew little about Qatanani's life before he came to Paterson. Its representatives pointed to the cleric's brother-in-law, Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, a West Bank leader of Hamas who was jailed in Israel and later killed in a missile strike in 2001.

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