

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Interview of Sibel Edmonds, former translator, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Type of Event: Interview

Date: February 11, 2004

Special Access Issues: Law Enforcement Sensitive Investigative Matter

Prepared by: Christine Healey

Team number: 6

Location: GSA SCIF

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE  
INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,  
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)  
ISCAP APPEAL NO. 2012-048, document no. 3  
DECLASSIFICATION DATE: July 8, 2015

Participants Non-Commission: Sibel Edmonds

Participants Commission: Christine Healey, Lance Cole

**NOTE:** Sibel Edmonds is a former FBI contract translator. Many of her allegations concerning the FBI are under investigation by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Justice. (In addition, the audit staff of the OIG is looking at systemic problems in the Language Services Division of the FBI. This review may be finished in June 2004.) Edmonds also brought a lawsuit against the Department of Justice which has been dismissed in whole or in part on state secret privilege grounds. Christine Healey spoke to Edmonds's attorney Eric Sieff of Seiff, Kretz and Abercombie, 645 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022, 212-371-6883, prior to the interview. He assured her he was fine with Edmonds attending the Commission interview. Edmonds first came to the Commission with members of the Family Steering Committee. Gail Sheehy wrote a lengthy profile of her that appeared in The New York Observer earlier this year and she was the subject of a 60 Minutes story on July 13, 2003. Edmonds sent packages of material to the Commission on 5/30/03 and 1/6/04.

The Commission interview was at least three hours long and was recorded. Not every detail of Edmonds's background or of the way she was treated by FBI is included in this MFR.

**Background.** Ms. Edmonds lived 7 or 8 years in Iran. Her father was Iranian, a surgeon in Tehran, and her mother Turkish. They left in 1982 as if going on vacation but moved to Turkey. Edmonds came to the United States in 1988. She married a U.S. citizen in 1992 and became a citizen in 1996. While attending George Washington University, where she obtained a B.A. in criminal justice and psychology, she sought an internship with the FBI (early 1998 or late 1997). A few weeks later the FBI contacted her and asked her to take a language proficiency test. She qualified as a language monitor in

Farsi (her second language) and she went through the application process for employment. At some point, she also was tested for Turkish. She was told the background investigation could take 6 – 15 months. By the beginning of 2001 she was curious about what had happened to her application. She contacted the FBI headquarters and a woman named Christine Primes looked into the matter and reported that the application had been lost. The application was reactivated and Edmonds took a polygraph in May 2001.

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**Employment.** Around September 14 or 15, 2001, Mike Feghali, the language services supervisor for Farsi and Turkish, called her from the Washington Field Office and asked how soon she could start. He said they needed her desperately. Edmonds said when she applied to the FBI she was not thinking about being a linguist, she had been thinking about a career in the FBI. Even though she had a heavy course load in the fall of 2001, she said it felt like a duty or obligation to help if she could. She went to the FBI for a security briefing and to sign various forms. She was impressed with how strict the rules were for security.

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Once she started at the FBI she worked about 25 hours a week, 2 – 3 days a week. She worked closely with [redacted] \* on Turkish counterintelligence matters. She learned that the FBI had never had a Turkish linguist before, although two Iranian linguists were translating documents [the implication being, not well.] She explained linguists and monitors are not specifically assigned to an agent. In fact, she would be asked to translate documents and material from other field offices, as well as cover the regular “lines” or intercepts. Work from other offices was assigned by Feghali. She explained how she did translations, highlighting multiple meanings for the agents. She said in one case she helped identify a double agent [redacted] earning a commendation.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

On October 14 – 15, Fegali came to her with tapes involving a tap [redacted] [redacted] criminal case. These had been sent for a summary translation (as compared to a verbatim translation) because the agent had a hunch about the tapes but the original translator had marked the tapes as nothing important. Edmonds was concerned about these tapes because the tape of September 10<sup>th</sup> involved a conversation about construction of really tall buildings (and such buildings do not exist in that part of Iran) and on September 12<sup>th</sup> the discussion was about “happy Eid” when there was no Moslem holiday on that date. In addition, the tape appeared to be coded but said something about:

after this we are going to be using women, ages 18 – 22, for visas. We will take them to another place. No more guys, we are concentrating on women.

Edmonds said she went to Fegali with the tape and her translation and told him he should be in touch with the agent because it sounded like something more than a social conversation. Two or three days later she asked Fegali what happened to the tape and he told her there was nothing there and the case was closed. He asked her how she would

like someone criticizing her work like that. Edmonds said two other translators told her that sort of thing happens at the FBI.

In answer to the question whether this was the first time she had concerns about procedures at WFO, she said three weeks earlier she met Kevin Taskeson, who was supposed to be a Turkish translator but who could not speak English. His wife, however, worked at Headquarters testing linguists and she had helped Fegali with lots of favors before. At the time, members of Fegali's family worked at FBI as translators. Taskeson had been a busboy at a restaurant. He would work at FBI until he could open a restaurant.

In addition, Edmonds said she saw other unprofessional conduct. She found people in the language services unit very lax; the Hebrew and Arabic translators had desks far apart from each other, as well as the Indian and Pakistani translators, since they had gotten into fist fights in the past. She said translators had keys that admitted them anywhere but agents could not enter the translation area. She said they had special laptops but she frequently saw email notices about missing laptops.

She also described the difference between being a language monitor and a language specialist. The work of monitors was supposed to have a second reading but those rules and procedures were not being followed.

Edmonds described being appalled by circumstances involving another Turkish language specialist. Around November 15 - 20, a third Turkish linguist joined the unit. This was Melek Can Dickerson, who worked full time. Dickerson was Turkish-born and married to a member of the U.S. Air Force. Edmonds believes the husband worked weapons procurement issues. After two weeks, Dickerson complained that the FBI was conducting surveillance of two associated Turkish-American organizations and said there would be nothing there.

A week or two later Dickerson invited herself and her husband to the Edmonds's home. Dickerson said in front of Edmonds and her husband that she once worked for one of the target Turkish-American organizations. The organization, according to Edmonds, was suspected of money laundering and criminal activities. Dickerson's husband, who had been asking a lot of questions about the Edmonds's contacts with Turkish groups, made a comment that the Edmondses should join one of the target organizations. They would be very interested in her because of her job and if she wanted to take an early retirement she could live very well if she went to that country. In addition, the Dickersons mention their contacts with the individual who ran the organization who is suspected of criminal activity and the subject of surveillance.

When Edmonds returned to the office on Monday or Tuesday she told Fegali about the conversation. He told her that Dickerson has gone through a background investigation and she should accept that the security office had done its job. Edmonds said she thought Dickerson was an informant but colleagues in the Farsi unit she told about this laughed.

Later, after Dickerson had taken a vacation in Turkey, she approached Edmonds and Taskeson and suggested they divide up the lines they are supposed to monitor among themselves. Dickerson said she would take all the lines for the target individual target and target organization. Edmonds told her to go to Fegali about this. But Dickerson asked her why she cared about this.

Edmonds went back to Fegali who started talking about agents and translators and how agents are second-class citizens but "this is our time."

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At this point Edmonds decided she and Taskeson should speak to agent [redacted]. He was angry, and showed them some of Dickerson's work on the individual and organization. All of these were marked not pertinent, personal, etc. [redacted] asked her to retranslate some of Dickerson's work (Edmonds and Taskeson found significant information that Dickerson has not translated in the material.) [redacted] also told them that Fegali was a crook who threatened to bring a lawsuit for discrimination when he was refused a promotion. [redacted] set up a meeting with Fegali for the next Friday. On the day of the meeting Edmonds was with [redacted] when Fegali canceled the meeting. However, when he saw Edmonds he claimed [redacted] could not make the meeting. Edmonds tried to get Fegali to bring the acting supervisor of the entire unit, Stephanie Bryant, into the meeting.

At some point Edmonds talked to Bryant who appeared to have a notebook containing charges against Fegali. Bryant said that Fegali should have reported the Dickerson issue to her. Edmonds also at some point told Bryant that Edmonds's name has been attached to translations she has not done. Edmonds had given Fegali a memo about this on January 7<sup>th</sup> asking that the forgeries be reported and called back. When Edmonds discussed this with Bryant in mid-January, she asked that Edmonds prepare a comprehensive memo on the issues for her. Bryant told her to write the matter up at home where Fegali would not have access to it, put it on a disk, and erase it from the computer. Bryant said they would bring it to Thomas Fields.

After Edmonds produced the disk, and Bryant went to talk to Fields, who was the special agent who supervised language services, Bryant told Edmonds that things are done differently in government. In government, things are swept under the rug and the unwritten policy is not to embarrass the Bureau. Bryant advised her that this matter could be very severe for the language department and asked "if you shake out Dickerson, how many others are going to shake out?" According to Edmonds, Bryant said, "Don't tell me, I didn't warn you." Later Bryant told Edmonds that she has to report her to Security for writing the memo on her home computer.

When Edmonds was interviewed by the security office, the officer Melinda Tilton at first said the matter did not appear to be severe. Later she told Edmonds that Bryant insisted Edmonds's computer be confiscated. Tilton gave Edmonds the choice to turn over her computer or else be served with a warrant for it. Edmonds said the FBI did not find anything on the computer.

At the same time, Bryant told Edmonds and Taskeson to continue to review Dickerson's translations. They do 6 out of 200 and find in one that the target individual had a list of individuals picked up after 9/11 that he wants to get them out of the country since they know too much about his drug dealing. The tapes also indicated that he had an information selling ring. Graduate students at nuclear facility would make information available to the target to sell to the highest bidder. Huge amounts of money were involved. Edmonds explained that only a few people at the second organization were suspected of involvement in the criminal dealings of the first.

[ ] was livid about this information; he told Edmonds that Dickerson had joined the FBI without having gone through a background investigation.

At some point, Dickerson said to Edmonds that this is a stupid job and "why do you want to put your family in danger?"

In January, Edmonds was contacted by a Chicago agent through [ ] who asked her to translate more tapes. The agent, [ ] told her he is concerned that for four years he has been getting nothing but garbage translations. He asked for her help. He wanted 4 or 5 verbatim translations randomly chosen. Edmonds said that the tapes involved conversations among members of the target organization and concerned national politicians from Illinois. One discussion involved the demand of a member of Congress to deliver cash to his townhouse if they wanted him to stop a piece of legislation moving forward. Another conversation involved the fact that the organization was getting a lot of information from another politician who was having an extramarital, same-sex affair with an individual who was reporting to their organization. Another conversation had to do with a nuclear facility in the Midwest. The Saudis would pay for information and give it to Afghanistan and bin Laden.

The Chicago agent, told Edmonds that they were going to open parallel criminal cases on these matters. Around February 15, [ ] sent 4500 communications to her from 1996 - 2002.

Edmonds also reported that she saw Dickerson carry duffle bags filled with documents out of the FBI. There was no security check when employees took material out of the building.

Edmonds said she wrote a certified letter to Dale Watson on February 4, 2002. Around the same time, Thomas Frields asked her to come to his office for a meeting. Bryant was there. At the meeting, Frields said it was wonderful she had language skills and that she should apply to become an agent and the FBI could pay for her education. He said, "You aren't saying the hardworking people doing security aren't doing their jobs, are you?" He told her not to worry about the safety of her family in the U.S. but there was nothing they could do about her family in Turkey. He told her that she had a bright future at the FBI but if she insisted in pursuing the security violations he told her that she would become the subject of an investigation. He asked whether she had told others about this information since it was top secret material. She told him she had written to Dale Watson.

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Edmonds said she called Dale Watson's office and was told by his secretary that Tim Caruso, Watson's deputy, had the letter and would meet with her. One of her colleagues told her before the meeting that Caruso and Watson had worked together for 15 years. Caruso only listened to her for an hour and a half or two hours and did not take notes. He said it was a horrible situation but what can you do.

Edmonds said [ ] came to her and said he was disgusted with the FBI and he was only staying until he got promoted. He gave her friendly advice to prepare her letter of resignation and not look back. He said you can't go to the Senate because of double extortion (i.e. the Senate can not do effective oversight of the FBI because the FBI knows too much about members of the Senate) and the Office of Professional Responsibility is a joke.

By the end of February, Bryant told her that a polygraph had been scheduled for her on March 14. If she refused to take it, she would be fired. If she failed it, she would be fired. Edmonds said she asked Bryant for a letter about why she had to take the test but was refused one. In response to this, Edmonds sent letters to Bryant, Fields and others but no one responded. She talked with an official in OPR on March 12 and was told to take the polygraph. Edmonds's work started to disappear from her computer queue.

When she attended the polygraph on March 13 she was supposed to sign a form that says she understands the reasons why the polygraph is being administered. She said she protested this because she did not know why she had to take the polygraph. She took the test and understands she passed it 100%. She met with OPR the next day and gave a transcribed statement. She did not discuss the specifics of the political corruption cases.

On March 20, 2002, as she was preparing to leave the building, Bryant asked her to meet with her, Fields and the head of security. Fegali saw her waiting for the meeting to begin, called her a whore and said she was going to be fired. Edmonds said she was fired (although she was a contract employee throughout).

She has already gone to the Senate Judiciary by 3/2/02 and she went to the DoJ IG. She does not understand why the IG investigation has taken two years.

Edmonds described another translator she knew who had been forced to retire from the FBI who had recently met with the FSC and who was willing to meet with the Commission. (She said the OIG had asked this translator not to go to the Senate or to 9-11 Commission.) She said the translator Behrooz Sarchar had gone out with FBI agents to meet an informant who had working for the FBI since 1992. According to Edmonds, she understood from Sarchar that in a meeting in March 2001 the informant described three subsources, one with the Blind Sheik, one with Bin Laden and one unknown. The informant told the agents that Bin Laden was planning a suicide mission to hit major cities with airplanes and some of his operatives were already in the United States. The informant asked what happened to this information at the next meeting and one of the

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agents said he made a report of this conversation and sent it on to headquarters. Edmonds said the informant is ready to go public with the information and tell what happened.

Edmonds said that there was another FBI agent who is also considering coming forward to the Commission. He had retired with 30 years experience. He would be able to trace how the Blind Sheik got his visa and the similarities with the way visas were gotten in 2001.

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