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Who's Afraid of Sibel Edmonds?

The gagged whistleblower goes on the record.

SIBEL EDMONDS has a story to tell. She went to work as a Turkish and Farsi translator for the FBI five days after 9/11. Part of her job was to translate and transcribe recordings of conversations between suspected Turkish intelligence agents and their American contacts. She was fired from the FBI in April 2002 after she raised concerns that one of the translators in her section was a member of a Turkish organization that was under investigation for bribing senior government officials and members of Congress, drug trafficking, illegal weapons sales, money laundering, and nuclear proliferation. She appealed her termination, but was more alarmed that no effort was being made to address the corruption that she had been monitoring.

A Department of Justice inspector general's report called Edmonds's allegations "credible," "serious," and "warrant[ing] a thorough and careful review by the FBI." Ranking Senate Judiciary Committee members Pat Leahy (D-Vt.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) have backed her publicly. "60 Minutes" launched an investigation of her claims and found them believable. No one has ever disproved any of Edmonds's revelations, which she says can be verified by FBI investigative files.

John Ashcroft's Justice Department confirmed Edmonds's veracity in a backhanded way by twice invoking the dubious State Secrets Privilege so she could not tell what she knows. The ACLU has

called her "the most gagged person in the history of the United States of America."

But on Aug. 8, she was finally able to testify under oath in a court case filed in Ohio and agreed to an interview with *The American Conservative* based on that testimony. What follows is her own account of what some consider the most incredible tale of corruption and influence peddling in recent times. As Sibel herself puts it, "If this were written up as a novel, no one would believe it."

PHILIP GIRALDI: We were very interested to learn of your four-hour deposition in the case involving allegations that Congresswoman Jean Schmidt accepted money from the Turkish government in return for political favors. You provided many names and details for the first time on the record and swore an oath confirming that the deposition was true.

Basically, you map out a corruption scheme involving U.S. government employees and members of Congress and agents of foreign governments. These agents were able to obtain information that was either used directly by those foreign governments or sold to third parties, with the proceeds often used as bribes to breed further corruption. Let's start with the first government official you identified, Marc Grossman, then the third highest-ranking official at the State Department.

SIBEL EDMONDS: During my work with the FBI, one of the major operational files that I was transcribing and translating started in late 1996 and continued until 2002, when I left the Bureau. Because the FBI had had no Turkish translators, these files were archived, but were considered to be very important operations. As part of the background, I was briefed about why these operations had been initiated and who the targets were.

Grossman became a person of interest early on in the investigative file while he was the U.S. ambassador to Turkey [1994-97], when he became personally involved with operatives both from the Turkish government and from suspected criminal groups. He also had suspicious contact with a number of official and non-official Israelis. Grossman was removed from Turkey short of tour during a scandal referred to as "Susurluk" by the media. It involved a number of high-level criminals as well as senior army and intelligence officers with whom he had been in contact.

Another individual who was working for Grossman, Air Force Major Douglas Dickerson, was also removed from Turkey and sent to Germany. After he and his Turkish wife Can returned to the U.S., he went to work for Douglas Feith and she was hired as an FBI Turkish translator. My complaints about her connection to Turkish lobbying groups led to my eventual firing.

Grossman and Dickerson had to

leave the country because a big investigation had started in Turkey. Special prosecutors were appointed, and the case was headlined in England, Germany, Italy, and in some of the Balkan countries because the criminal groups were found to be active in all those places. A leading figure in the scandal, Mehmet Eymür, led a major paramilitary group for the Turkish intelligence service. To keep him from testifying, Eymür was sent by the Turkish government to the United States, where he worked for eight months as head of intelligence at the Turkish Embassy in Washington. He later became a U.S. citizen and now lives in McLean, Virginia. The central figure in this scandal was Abdullah Catli. In 1989, while “most wanted” by Interpol, he came to the U.S., was granted residency, and settled in Chicago, where he continued to conduct his operations until 1996.

GIRALDI: So Grossman at this point comes back to the United States. He’s rewarded with the third-highest position at the State Department, and he allegedly uses this position to do favors for “Turkish interests”—both for the Turkish government and for possible criminal interests. Sometimes, the two converge. The FBI is aware of his activities and is listening to his phone calls. When someone who is Turkish calls Grossman, the FBI monitors that individual’s phone calls, and when the Turk calls a friend who is a Pakistani or an Egyptian or a Saudi, they monitor all those contacts, widening the net.

EDMONDS: Correct.

GIRALDI: And Grossman received money as a result. In one case, you said that a State Department colleague went to pick up a bag of money...

EDMONDS: \$14,000

GIRALDI: What kind of information was Grossman giving to foreign countries? Did he give assistance to foreign individuals penetrating U.S. government labs and defense installations as has been reported? It’s also been reported that he was the conduit to a group of congressmen who become, in a sense, the targets to be recruited as “agents of influence.”

EDMONDS: Yes, that’s correct. Grossman assisted his Turkish and Israeli contacts directly, and he also facilitated access to members of Congress who might be inclined to help for reasons of their own or could be bribed into cooperation. The top person obtaining classified information was Congressman Tom Lantos. A Lantos associate, Alan Makovsky worked very closely with Dr. Sabri Sayari in Georgetown University, who is widely believed to be a Turkish spy. Lantos would give Makovsky highly classified policy-related documents obtained during defense briefings for passage to Israel because Makovsky was also working for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

GIRALDI: Makovsky is now working for the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, a pro-Israeli think tank.

EDMONDS: Yes. Lantos was at the time probably the most outspoken supporter of Israel in Congress. AIPAC would take out the information from Lantos that was relevant to Israel, and they would give the rest of it to their Turkish associates. The Turks would go through the leftovers, take what they wanted, and then try to sell the rest. If there were something relevant to Pakistan, they would contact the ISI officer at the embassy and say, “We’ve got this and this, let’s sit down and talk.” And then they would sell it to the Pakistanis.

GIRALDI: ISI—Pakistani intelligence—has been linked to the Pakistani nuclear proliferation program as well as to al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

So the FBI was monitoring these connections going from a congressman to a congressman’s assistant to a foreign individual who is connected with intelligence to other intelligence people who are located at different embassies in Washington. And all of this information is in an FBI file somewhere?

EDMONDS: Two sets of FBI files, but the AIPAC-related files and the Turkish files ended up converging in one. The FBI agents believed that they were looking at the same operation. It didn’t start with AIPAC originally. It started with the Israeli Embassy. The original targets were intelligence officers under diplomatic cover in the Turkish Embassy and the Israeli Embassy. It was those contacts that led to the American Turkish Council and the Assembly of Turkish American Associations and then to AIPAC fronting for the Israelis. It moved forward from there.

GIRALDI: So the FBI was monitoring people from the Israeli Embassy and the Turkish Embassy and one, might presume, the Pakistani Embassy as well?

EDMONDS: They were the secondary target. They got leftovers from the Turks and Israelis. The FBI would intercept communications to try to identify who the diplomatic target’s intelligence chief was, but then, in addition to that, there are individuals there, maybe the military attaché, who had their own contacts who were operating independently of others in the embassy.

GIRALDI: So the network starts with a person like Grossman in the State Department providing information that enables Turkish and Israeli intelligence

officers to have access to people in Congress, who then provide classified information that winds up in the foreign embassies?

EDMONDS: Absolutely. And we also had Pentagon officials doing the same thing. We were looking at Richard Perle and Douglas Feith. They had a list of individuals in the Pentagon broken down by access to certain types of information. Some of them would be policy related, some of them would be weapons-technology related, some of them would be nuclear-related. Perle and Feith would provide the names of those Americans, officials in the Pentagon, to Grossman, together with highly sensitive personal information: this person is a closet gay; this person has a chronic gambling issue; this person is an alcoholic. The files on the American targets would contain things like the size of their mortgages or whether they were going through divorces. One Air Force major I remember was going through a really nasty divorce and a child custody fight. They detailed all different kinds of vulnerabilities.

GIRALDI: So they had access to their personnel files and also their security files and were illegally accessing this kind of information to give to foreign agents who exploited the vulnerabilities of these people to recruit them as sources of information?

EDMONDS: Yes. Some of those individuals on the list were also working for the RAND Corporation. RAND ended up becoming one of the prime targets for these foreign agents.

GIRALDI: RAND does highly classified research for the U.S. government. So they were setting up these people for recruitment as agents or as agents of influence?

EDMONDS: Yes, and the RAND sources would be paid peanuts compared to what the information was worth when it was sold if it was not immediately useful for Turkey or Israel. They also had sources who were working in some midwestern Air Force bases. The sources would provide the information on CD's and DVD's. In one case, for example, a Turkish military attaché got the disc and discovered that it was something really important, so he offered it to the Pakistani ISI person at the embassy, but the price was too high. Then a Turkish contact in Chicago said he knew two Saudi businessmen in Detroit who would be very interested in this information, and they would pay the price. So the Turkish military attaché flew to Detroit with his assistant to make the sale.

GIRALDI: We know Grossman was receiving money for services.

EDMONDS: Yes. Sometimes he would give money to the people who were working with him, identified in phone calls on a first-name basis, whether it's a John or a Joe. He also took care of some other people, including his contact at the *New York Times*. Grossman would brag, "We just fax to our people at the *New York Times*. They print it under their names."

GIRALDI: Did Feith and Perle receive any money that you know of?

EDMONDS: No.

GIRALDI: So they were doing favors for other reasons. Both Feith and Perle were lobbyists for Turkey and also were involved with Israel on defense contracts, including some for Northrop Grumman, which Feith represented in Israel.

EDMONDS: They had arrangements with various companies, some of them

members of the American Turkish Council. They had arrangements with Kissinger's group, with Northrop Grumman, with former secretary of state James Baker's group, and also with former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft.

The monitoring of the Turks picked up contacts with Feith, Wolfowitz, and Perle in the summer of 2001, four months before 9/11. They were discussing with the Turkish ambassador in Washington an arrangement whereby the U.S. would invade Iraq and divide the country. The UK would take the south, the rest would go to the U.S. They were negotiating what Turkey required in exchange for allowing an attack from Turkish soil. The Turks were very supportive, but wanted a three-part division of Iraq to include their own occupation of the Kurdish region. The three Defense Department officials said that would be more than they could agree to, but they continued daily communications to the ambassador and his defense attaché in an attempt to convince them to help.

Meanwhile Scowcroft, who was also the chairman of the American Turkish Council, Baker, Richard Armitage, and Grossman began negotiating separately for a possible Turkish protectorate. Nothing was decided, and then 9/11 took place.

Scowcroft was all for invading Iraq in 2001 and even wrote a paper for the Pentagon explaining why the Turkish northern front would be essential. I know Scowcroft came off as a hero to some for saying he was against the war, but he was very much for it until his client's conditions were not met by the Bush administration.

GIRALDI: Armitage was deputy secretary of state at the time Scowcroft and Baker were running their own consulting firms that were doing business with Turkey. Grossman had just become

undersecretary, third in the State hierarchy behind Armitage.

You've previously alluded to efforts by Grossman, as well as high-ranking officials at the Pentagon, to place Ph.D. students. Can you describe that in more detail?

EDMONDS: The seeding operation started before Marc Grossman arrived at the State Department. The Turkish agents had a network of Turkish professors in various universities with access to government information. Their top source was a Turkish-born professor of

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nuclear physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was useful because MIT would place a bunch of Ph.D. or graduate-level students in various nuclear facilities like Sandia or Los Alamos, and some of them were able to work for the Air Force. He would provide the list of Ph.D. students who should get these positions. In some cases, the Turkish military attaché would ask that certain students be placed in important positions. And they were not necessarily all Turkish, but the ones they selected had struck deals with the Turkish agents to provide information in return for money. If for some reason they had difficulty getting a security clearance, Grossman would ensure that the State Department would arrange to clear them.

In exchange for the information that these students would provide, they would be paid \$4,000 or \$5,000. And the information that was sold to the two Saudis in Detroit went for something like \$350,000 or \$400,000.

GIRALDI: This corruption wasn't confined to the State Department and the Pentagon—it infected Congress as well. You've named people like former House Speaker Dennis Hastert, now a registered agent of the Turkish government. In your deposition, you describe the process of breaking foreign-originated contributions into small units, \$200 or less, so that the source didn't have to be reported. Was this the primary means of influencing congressmen, or did foreign agents exploit vulnerabilities to get what they wanted using something like blackmail?

EDMONDS: In early 1997, because of the information that the FBI was getting on the Turkish diplomatic community, the Justice Department had already started to investigate several Republican congressmen. The number-one congressman involved with the Turkish community, both in terms of providing information and doing favors, was Bob Livingston. Number-two after him was Dan Burton, and then he became number-one until Hastert became the speaker of the House. Bill Clinton's attorney general, Janet Reno, was briefed on the investigations, and since they were Republicans, she authorized that they be continued.

Well, as the FBI developed more information, Tom Lantos was added to this list, and then they got a lot on Douglas Feith and Richard Perle and Marc Grossman. At this point, the Justice Department said they wanted the FBI to only focus on Congress, leaving the executive branch people out of it. But the FBI agents involved wanted to con-

tinue pursuing Perle and Feith because the Israeli Embassy was also connected. Then the Monica Lewinsky scandal erupted, and everything was placed on the back burner.

But some of the agents continued to investigate the congressional connection. In 1999, they wiretapped the congressmen directly. (Prior to that point they were getting all their information secondhand through FISA, as their primary targets were foreigners.) The questionably legal wiretap gave the perfect excuse to the Justice Department. As soon as they found out, they refused permission to monitor the congressmen and Grossman as primary targets. But the inquiry was kept alive in Chicago because the FBI office there was pursuing its own investigation. The epicenter of a lot of the foreign espionage activity was Chicago.

GIRALDI: So the investigation stopped in Washington, but continued in Chicago?

EDMONDS: Yes, and in 2000, another representative was added to the list, Jan Schakowsky, the Democratic congresswoman from Illinois. Turkish agents started gathering information on her, and they found out that she was bisexual. So a Turkish agent struck up a relationship with her. When Jan Schakowsky's mother died, the Turkish woman went to the funeral, hoping to exploit her vulnerability. They later were intimate in Schakowsky's townhouse, which had been set up with recording devices and hidden cameras. They needed Schakowsky and her husband Robert Creamer to perform certain illegal operational facilitations for them in Illinois. They already had Hastert, the mayor, and several other Illinois state senators involved. I don't know if Congresswoman Schakowsky ever was actually blackmailed or did anything for the Turkish woman.

GIRALDI: So we have a pattern of corruption starting with government officials providing information to foreigners and helping them make contact with other Americans who had valuable information. Some of these officials, like Marc Grossman, were receiving money directly. Others were receiving business favors: Pentagon associates like Doug Feith and Richard Perle had interests in Israel and Turkey. The stolen information was being sold, and the money that was being generated was used to corrupt certain congressmen to influence policy and provide still more information—in many cases information related to nuclear technology.

EDMONDS: As well as weapons technology, conventional weapons technology, and Pentagon policy-related information.

GIRALDI: You also have information on al-Qaeda, specifically al-Qaeda in Central Asia and Bosnia. You were privy to conversations that suggested the CIA was supporting al-Qaeda in central Asia and the Balkans, training people to get money, get weapons, and this contact continued until 9/11...

EDMONDS: I don't know if it was CIA. There were certain forces in the U.S. government who worked with the Turkish paramilitary groups, including Abdullah Çatli's group, Fethullah Gülen.

GIRALDI: Well, that could be either Joint Special Operations Command or CIA.

EDMONDS: Maybe in a lot of cases when they said State Department, they meant CIA?

GIRALDI: When they said State Department, they probably meant CIA.

EDMONDS: Okay. So these conversations, between 1997 and 2001, had to do with a Central Asia operation that involved bin Laden. Not once did anybody use the word "al-Qaeda." It was always "mujahideen," always "bin Laden" and, in fact, not "bin Laden" but "bin Ladens" plural. There were several bin Ladens who were going on private jets to Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. The Turkish ambassador in Azerbaijan worked with them.

There were bin Ladens, with the help of Pakistanis or Saudis, under our management. Marc Grossman was leading it, 100 percent, bringing people from East Turkestan into Kyrgyzstan, from Kyrgyzstan to Azerbaijan, from Azerbaijan some of them were being channeled to Chechnya, some of them were being channeled to Bosnia. From Turkey, they were putting all these bin Ladens on NATO planes. People and weapons went one way, drugs came back.

GIRALDI: Was the U.S. government aware of this circular deal?

EDMONDS: 100 percent. A lot of the drugs were going to Belgium with NATO planes. After that, they went to the UK, and a lot came to the U.S. via military planes to distribution centers in Chicago and Paterson, New Jersey. Turkish diplomats who would never be searched were coming with suitcases of heroin.

GIRALDI: And, of course, none of this has been investigated. What do you think the chances are that the Obama administration will try to end this criminal activity?

EDMONDS: Well, even during Obama's presidential campaign, I did not buy into his slogan of "change" being promoted by the media and, unfortunately, by the naive blogosphere. First of all, Obama's record as a senator, short as it

was, spoke clearly. For all those changes that he was promising, he had done nothing. In fact, he had taken the opposite position, whether it was regarding the NSA's wiretapping or the issue of national-security whistleblowers. We whistleblowers had written to his Senate office. He never responded, even though he was on the relevant committees.

As soon as Obama became president, he showed us that the State Secrets Privilege was going to continue to be a tool of choice. It's an arcane executive privilege to cover up wrongdoing—in many cases, criminal activities. And the Obama administration has not only defended using the State Secrets Privilege, it has been trying to take it even further than the previous terrible administration by maintaining that the U.S. government has sovereign immunity. This is Obama's change: his administration seems to think it doesn't even have to invoke state secrets as our leaders are emperors who possess this sovereign immunity. This is not the kind of language that anybody in a democracy would use.

The other thing I noticed is how Chicago, with its culture of political corruption, is central to the new administration. When I saw that Obama's choice of chief of staff was Rahm Emanuel, knowing his relationship with Mayor Richard Daley and with the Hastert crowd, I knew we were not going to see positive changes. Changes possibly, but changes for the worse. It was no coincidence that the Turkish criminal entity's operation centered on Chicago. ■

Sibel Edmonds is a former FBI translator and the founder of the National Security Whistleblowers Coalition. Philip Giraldi is a former CIA officer and The American Conservative's Deep Background columnist.