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MFR04019826

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Interview of Behrooz Sarshar, former FBI translator

Type of Event: Interview

Date: February 12, 2004

Special Access Issues: Source and FISA target information

Prepared by: Christine Healey

Team number: 6

Location: Secure conference room, K Street Office

Participants Non-Commission: Behrooz Sarshar

Participants Commission: Dan Marcus, Christine Healey, Lance Cole

NOTE: Members of the Family Support Group requested that the Commission meet with Mr. Sarshar. Dan Marcus arranged for a meeting with Mr. Sarshar. The meeting became an interview and was recorded. Sibel Edmonds, another former FBI translator, provided information concerning Mr. Sarshar during her interview with Chris Healey and Lance Cole on February 11, 2004.

BACKGROUND: Mr. Sarshar is an Iranian émigré in his mid-sixties. He stated he was forced to retire from the FBI (in November 2002) after a two-and-a-half year OPR investigation in which he was accused of talking about FBI matters with non-FBI people.

[redacted] Mr. Sarshar expressed sadness and despair that he had been pushed out of the FBI for reasons he could not understand and he described his difficulties in finding new employment because of the fact that his clearance would have been revoked if he had stayed at the Bureau. He said he had served the FBI loyally. He could not go back to Iran while the current regime was in power. He was being forced to start over again in life.

[NOTE: On Thursday, February 26, 2004, the Department of Justice Inspector General provided to the Commission a transcript of the 1/20/04 OIG interview of Mr. Sarshar (taken in connection with investigation relating to Sibel Edmond's allegations). The OIG also provided two letters Mr. Sarshar wrote to Director Mueller; a letter to Mr. Sarshar from the FBI stating that his decision to retire was irrevocable and a letter from the Chief of the FBI's Personnel Security Section stating that if Mr. Sarshar had not separated from employment it was the intention of the chief to revoke his clearance. The letters to Mueller, written in November 2002 and January 2003, appear to be roughly consistent with what he said in his Commission interview. However, Mr. Sarshar did not

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 INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,
 E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)
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 DECLASSIFICATION DATE: July 8, 2015

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tell Commission staff that he had reported the "kamikaze pilot" information to Director Mueller in January 2003. See last NOTE.]

Mr. Sarshar said he worked foreign counterintelligence (FCI), counterterrorism and criminal matters at the FBI over seven years, first as a contract linguist and then as a language specialist employee. He said he testified in court seven times, including in MEK prosecutions in California, and was seen "by friends and enemies" in Fox News coverage of an FBI raid. [NOTE: Mr. Sarshar's letter of January 1, 2003 to Director Mueller indicates that he was [redacted] before he was a linguist for the Bureau.]

[redacted]

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

[redacted]

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

Instead, the FBI brought in a young woman from Chicago who did not succeed. These events, however, apparently led to an investigation of Mr. Sarshar that he described in considerable detail. He said he was advised or pushed by Security to retire rather than be dismissed. He regretted this and tried to get reinstated. [In the letter to Mueller, he suggests that there were two agents who resented him and who may have influenced the security investigation.]

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Mr. Sarshar described the 8-hour polygraph he had been given after having been up all night on a raid and while fasting for religious reasons. He also described the support he received from various agents (including [redacted] and other matters. He said he had been classmates with Sibel Edmonds's father in Tehran and that he thinks she saw him as a father figure. He said there was one woman in the Farsi group at WFO who hated Ms. Edmonds from the start and he remembers that Ms. Edmonds told him while employed at FBI that her supervisor said not to work long or hard because the department wanted to get more linguists. He said he told the IG that he agreed with some of Ms. Edmonds's allegations and disagreed with some of them.

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SEPTEMBER 11 INFORMATION

Mr. Sarshar wanted the Commission to know about an asset debriefing he attended with [redacted] and another agent whose name he could not remember. (It could have been [redacted]) He said he hesitated to bring it forward because he did not think anything had been done deliberately. He thinks if the FBI had known about the plot they would have stopped it. He provided us the code name and name of the asset.

About 4 or 5 months before 9/11, he went with [redacted] and the other agent to the informant's house. Their regular routine was to meet [redacted]

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

At this meeting, the asset said a couple of times that Bin Laden's people are training kamikaze pilots for missions in Europe and America. [Lance's notes state that the asset said this at two meetings prior to 9/11.] Mr. Sarshar remembers translating "suicidal pilots" to "kamikaze pilots" and that the asset nodded when he heard this. The reaction of Mr. Sarshar and the agents was that this was unbelievable because they "only have donkeys in Afghanistan." Mr. Sarshar said the agents always took notes at meetings with the asset but he did not have a specific recollection of this.

Mr. Sarshar, who had been a colonel in the Iranian police, said in the finest law enforcement agencies there should be a place where this information comes together so we should know about it [he implied so the FBI would know about a plot.]

When asked if the asset mentioned where the training took place, Mr. Sarshar said the asset didn't say whether it was in the US or Europe. He is pretty certain the meeting took place in the spring. He was asked whether he discussed this information with the agents after 9/11 and he said no. He did not want to embarrass them. He told other translators about this after the attack. He mentioned [redacted] her husband, and Sibel Edmonds. He might have mentioned it to his supervisor Alina Bloom. When asked about the reaction of the agents to the report, he said they might not have believed it.

Mr. Sarshar said the asset reported on the Taliban and Taliban-Iranian connections. He said he thinks the asset had sources in Germany (Iranian émigrés) as well as in Afghanistan and Iran. The asset sometimes, but infrequently, gave information about terrorists in the United States. He provided reports about Mullah Omar, the IRG, and Bin Laden but the agents were mainly interested in information concerning terrorist groups in the United States. The asset earned [redacted] The agent would pay him in cash. Mr. Sarshar believes the asset is no longer working for the FBI.

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The agents were in a unit the name of which changed. He said he thought it was NS-1, CT-1, NS-11, NS-7. The squad had the same supervisor for five years, Tom Fields. [redacted] and [redacted] were also associated with the squad. [NOTE: In his interview with the IG, he mentioned other agents he worked with including Brad Ducet. [redacted] said in the interview that this is the agent who committed suicide at Headquarters and Mr. Sarshar affirms this.]

When asked why he waited so long to bring forward this information, he said he did not want to do any damage to the FBI. He also thought they had learned their lesson. He had thought a long time about telling the Senate or the Commission but he did not want people to think he was retaliating. His main goal is to help. He also thought the FBI knew it; he did not know where the report went.

When asked who else in the FBI he had told about this, he said he discussed it with [redacted] the investigator from the Department of Justice Inspector General. He said they spoke ½ hour about Sibel Edmonds and then 4 hours about his situation and he and his colleague [redacted] according to the transcript] said they said they would talk to their supervisor to see if they could help.

Mr. Sarshar said he knew some Arabic and helped translate the tape from the Flight 93 when it first became available. He described what he heard and said he did not believe the passengers got into the cockpit based on what he heard on the tape.

NOTE: Mr. Sarshar told us he wrote twice to Director Mueller. He did not mention to us that he wrote about the asset's report in one of the letters he wrote to Director Mueller. The OIG provided us a nine-page letter dated January 1, 2003, marked SECRET, from Mr. Sarshar. We do not know whether the IG got the letter from the FBI or from Mr. Sarshar. On page 7, at the end of six and a half pages on his contributions to the FBI, he wrote:

“Early in 2001 on two occasions I accompanied agents from NS-11 to asset debriefings. The asset provided specific information about threats to the United States. On both these occasions, he stated clearly that Usama bin Laden and his organization were training what he called ‘kamikaze pilots’ for terrorist activity in the U.S. I believe that every patriotic American, including all FBI agents and support personnel, would have taken this very seriously if they had known what would happen on September 11, 2001. It is my belief, however, that this information was not taken seriously by the higher-ups at the FBI. Who could have believed that such a thing would be possible?”

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