

Shooting the Messenger

Seven years after 9/11, top Republicans and Democrats continue to block FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmonds' revelations of high-level spies in the federal government.



Still sounding the alarm: Former FBI translator Sibel Edmonds is shown at a 2005 press conference on her whistle-blower court case.

by William F. Jasper

For six years, Sibel Edmonds has been carrying out an heroic crusade to protect her adopted country from national security threats within the top levels of the American government. Hired as an FBI translator in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, Edmonds, a Turkish American, threw herself into the daunting task of translating thousands of hours of recordings of backlogged intercepts in Turkic, Farsi, and Azerbaijani. What she heard on the tapes was alarming: Turkish agents in the United States bribing high-level U.S. officials and obtaining our military and intelligence secrets. What she witnessed at the FBI was even more appalling: translators who were intentionally filing false

translations and passing information to foreign powers; and, what's even worse, FBI superiors who did nothing about it when these serious breaches were brought to their attention.

Unwilling to settle for the bureaucratic "don't rock the boat" response she faced from immediate supervisors, Sibel Edmonds decided to take her concerns higher up the FBI chain of command. The result? She was fired, and those she tried to have investigated got off scot-free; some fled the country to avoid potential prosecution, while others continued their alleged criminal and treasonous activities. Some of the FBI colleagues who blocked her efforts were promoted.

How could this be, especially in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 at-

tacks, when "homeland security" was our number one concern? And especially since FBI Director Robert Mueller had expressly promised that the agency's notorious penchant for punishing whistle-blowers was now a thing of the past.

In a November 2001 memorandum to all FBI employees, Director Mueller stated: "I will not tolerate reprisals or intimidation by any bureau employee against those who make protected disclosures, nor will I tolerate attempts to prevent employees from making such disclosures."

However, Director Mueller's assurances notwithstanding, the case of Sibel Edmonds is Exhibit A in a long line of examples indicating that reprisal and intimidation against whistle-blowers continues to be standard operating procedure at the FBI and other federal agencies. The public may be tempted to wonder: "Well, if the national security compromises Mrs. Edmonds alleges are as grave as she claims, why doesn't she go the Congress, or the courts, or the media?" She has attempted to do all of that, but has been blocked at every turn by a smothering gag order imposed by the Bush administration under the "State Secrets Privilege." The gag order not only classified all of Edmonds' testimony to the 9/11 Commission, to the investigative staffs of congressional committees, and to the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG), but even letters by members of Congress requesting information from the executive branch.

Turkish Spy in the FBI?

Governments, obviously, have a legitimate interest in protecting secrets vital to national security. But as history abundantly shows, governments frequently invoke "national security" to avoid embarrassment or to protect those guilty of criminal negligence, corruption, or treason.

Sibel Edmonds has been threatened with prosecution and imprisonment if she reveals what she knows. Plain and simple,

the administration has been trying to make her disappear into a black hole. However, the petite, plucky whistle-blower refuses to be bowed or intimidated.

Considering the meat of Sibel Edmonds' charges, we may be fortunate indeed that she has been so tenacious and unyielding before the fearsome threat of a retaliatory indictment. The information she reportedly was privy to on nuclear proliferation alone is, literally, explosive, of the kind that has to do with the ultimate nightmare terrorist scenario: a nuke attack inside the United States.

Since Edmonds herself has been prevented from publicly naming names and providing details, most of what is now in the public domain about her case has come from leaks of documents by anonymous sources in government and the investigative work of "alternative media" journalists and Internet activists.

In December 2001, Sibel and her husband, Matthew Edmonds, received a surprise visit to their Alexandria, Virginia, home by one of Sibel's co-workers, Melek Can Dickerson, and her husband, Douglas. Like Sibel Edmonds, Melek was a Turkish translator for the FBI and carried a Top Secret security clearance. Her husband Douglas is a major in the U.S. Air Force who had served as a military attaché in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. According to Sibel and Matthew Edmonds, Maj. Dickerson proposed that the Edmonds become members of a certain Turkish "semi-legitimate organization," as Sibel Edmonds put it.

It has since been revealed (by others) that the organization referred to is the American Turkish Council (ATC), a lobbying and cultural organization that also allegedly functions as an intelligence front for the Turkish government.

Maj. Dickerson's mention of the "semi-legitimate organization" and high-level friends at the Turkish embassy in Washington, D.C., immediately set off Sibel's internal alarms; the ATC and some of the individuals he named were subjects of FBI counterterrorism investigations that she was working on.

It sounded to the Edmonds like they had just been propositioned to spy against their country for payoffs by a foreign power. According to Sibel Edmonds, she recounted the incident, both verbally and in writing,

to her FBI superiors.

Long story short: in March 2002, the FBI fired Sibel Edmonds for having a "disruptive effect" on the agency; Melek Can Dickerson, on the other hand, kept her job. No criminal charges were brought against the Dickersons and no known counterintelligence investigation was opened on them. Indeed, it appears the government did everything possible to shield them from investigation. When attorneys for Sibel Edmonds prepared to depose the Dickersons in a civil suit in August 2002, the Air Force conveniently transferred the Dickersons beyond legal reach, to a NATO assignment in Belgium.

Vindication and Warning

In July 2004, the Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General finished its investigation of the Edmonds' case — but it was immediately classified, assuring that its contents would not reach the public. Finally, in January 2005, the Office of the Inspector General released an unclassified summary of its report, which, at least partially, vindicated her claims. The OIG report reads, in part:

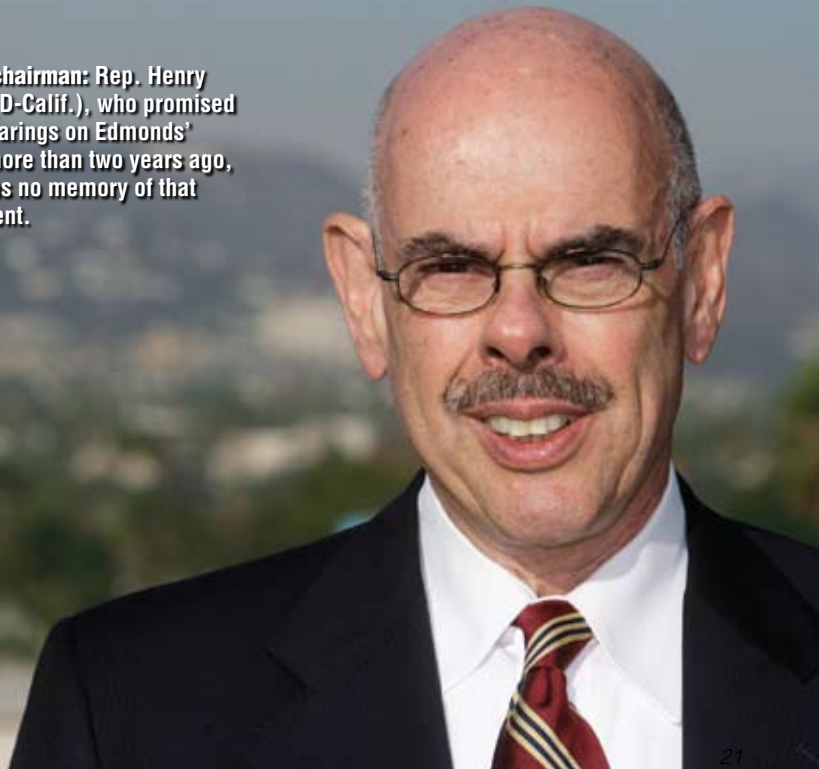
"She's credible, and the reason I feel she's very credible is because people within the FBI have corroborated a lot of her story."

**— Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa)
CBS 60 Minutes interview with Ed Bradley
October 27, 2002**

We found that many of Edmonds' core allegations relating to the co-worker were supported by either documentary evidence or witnesses other than Edmonds. Moreover, we concluded that, had the FBI performed a more careful investigation of Edmonds' allegations, it would have discovered evidence of significant omissions and inaccuracies by the co-worker related to these allegations. These omissions and inaccuracies, in turn, should have led to further investigation by the FBI.

The OIG found that "the FBI should have investigated the allegations more thoroughly" and that "the FBI's handling of these allegations reflected an unwarrant-

Flip-flop chairman: Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), who promised to hold hearings on Edmonds' charges more than two years ago, now claims no memory of that commitment.





AP Images

Bribes and treason? Former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman calls charges “outrageous.”

ed reluctance to vigorously investigate these serious allegations or to conduct a thorough examination of Edmonds’ allegations.”

Moreover, the Inspector General’s report noted, “The FBI did not, *and still has not*, conducted such an investigation.” (Emphasis added.) Finally, the OIG reported, “Rather than investigate Edmonds’ allegations vigorously and thoroughly, the FBI concluded that she was a disruption and terminated her contract.”

Senators Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont), both of whom sit on the Judiciary Committee and have heard Sibel Edmonds’ classified testimony, express confidence in her. “She’s credible,” Grassley told CBS *60 Minutes*, in a 2002 interview, one of the few broadcasts about Edmonds’ case by the major media. “And the reason I feel she’s very credible,” the senator continued, “is be-

cause people within the FBI have corroborated a lot of her story.” Does her case fall into any pattern of conduct on the part of the FBI, he was asked. “The usual pattern,” Senator Grassley responded. “Let me tell you, first of all, the embarrassing information comes out, the FBI reaction is to sweep it under the rug, and then eventually they shoot the messenger.”

A ray of hope seemed to appear in 2005 when Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) promised Edmonds that if the Democrats took control of Congress in 2006, he would hold hearings on her case. “But you know what happened,” Edmonds told THE NEW AMERICAN in a recent interview, “the Democrats *did* win the House and Rep. Waxman *did* become chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. But nothing has changed; there has been no investigation.” Rep.

Waxman seems to have developed selective amnesia, a common affliction on the Potomac. He has not responded to any of her calls or inquiries.

Bipartisan Obstruction

Perhaps, she suggested to THE NEW AMERICAN, Rep. Waxman is aware that Democrats could be as damaged by the revelations of bribery and espionage as the Republicans. “This didn’t start with the Bush administration,” she reminds us. “Many of the wiretaps I was translating at the FBI were from the 1990s, during the Clinton administration.”

Following up on her revelations, independent researchers have begun putting names on some of the “high-level officials” Edmonds had been referring to, but not identifying, over the past few years.

Late last year, Edmonds decided the stalling game had gone on long enough.

In December 2007, she approached the British newspaper, the *Sunday Times*, which ran an explosive story, “For sale: West’s deadly nuclear secrets,” on January 6. Edmonds described for the paper how “foreign intelligence agents had enlisted the support of US officials to acquire a network of moles in sensitive military and nuclear institutions.” She told how “one well-known senior official in the US State Department was being paid by Turkish agents in Washington who were selling the information on to black market buyers, including Pakistan.”

This same State Department official, she told the *Times*, “was aiding foreign operatives against US interests by passing them highly classified information, not only from the State Department but also from the Pentagon, in exchange for money, position and political objectives.”

The above-mentioned official, whom Edmonds and the *Times* did not identify, was outed in an article in the *American Conservative* by retired CIA officer Philip Giraldi. According to Giraldi, the official in question is Marc Grossman, a career State Department bureaucrat, who served as ambassador to Turkey under Bill Clinton, and retired in 2006 after serving as Under Secretary of State (the Number 3 position at the State Department) for George Bush.

In retirement, Grossman has followed a familiar career trajectory, accepting a lucrative “consulting” position at The Cohen Group, the lobbying outfit set up by former Clinton Defense Secretary William Cohen that counts Turkey as one of its chief clients.

Other former high officials who now openly ride the Turkey gravy train as paid lobbyists/consultants include former Democratic House Speaker Richard Gephardt and former Republican House Speaker Dennis Hastert. Hastert, allegedly, is one of the officials identified in FBI intercepts as receiving multiple cash payoffs through the American Turkish Council.

“If you made public all the information that the FBI have on this case,” Edmonds told the *Times*, “you will see very high-level people going through criminal trials.” Perhaps that explains why top Republicans and Democrats would rather see Sibel Edmonds locked up with a *permanent* gag order. ■