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MFR 03010876

Memorandum for the Record

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Event: Interview of Greg Ruppert
Type of Event: On-the-Record Interview
Date of interview: 10/3/03
Date memo prepared: 10/6/03
Special Access Issues: None
Prepared by: John Roth
Team Number: 4
Location: SIOC conference room
Classification: Secret
Present, non-Commission: Sheila Lawson, Pat O'Brien, Greg Ruppert, (all FBI)
Participants-Commission: John Roth and Doug Greenburg

This memorandum provides a summary of the most important points covered in the above-entitled interview, but is not a verbatim account. The memorandum is organized by subject and does not necessarily follow the order of the interview. The witness provided some information in this memorandum during the interview; other information was obtained through review of his report. (U)

Background

Ruppert was assigned to investigate whether there was a link between al Qaeda and the trading of conflict diamonds. The assignment came about as a result of Congressman Wolfe's interest in conflict diamonds and Washington Post articles (Farrah, Washington Post, November 2, 2001, page A1 and December 29, 2002, page A1) and the Global Witness Report For a Few Dollars More, (www.globalwitness.org) alleging that al Qaeda funded itself through the conflict diamond trade and, in anticipation of the terrorist attacks on 9/11/01, purchased diamonds to shelter assets from possible seizure in the months prior to the attack. Ruppert wrote an unclassified LHM report regarding his investigation, which was delivered to Congressman Wolfe. A copy of this report is attached, and this MFR will not describe in detail the results of Ruppert's findings, but serves instead to give context to it. The relevant Washington Post articles are attached as well. (U)

The Allegations

The source of the conflict diamonds problem is as a result of a civil war within Sierra Leone, in which the rebels, known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), were mining open beds of rough diamonds in order to fund their operations. According to the Farrah articles and Global Witness report, a total of three al Qaeda operatives (all wanted for their participation in the West Africa bombings) traveled to Monrovia, Liberia to meet with RUF commanders to purchase diamonds. Ultimately, the al Qaeda operatives were to have purchased \$20 million in diamonds, first as an investment and then as a way to shelter al Qaeda's assets from seizure in the months prior to 9/11. The initial trip, in

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September 1998, was made by al Qaeda operative **Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah** who reportedly met with RUF rebels to arrange the purchase of diamonds. Some weeks later, al Qaeda operatives **Fazul Abdullah Mohammed** and **Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani** arrived in Liberia and began a series of diamond deals that lasted through the summer of 2001. Brokering the deal with the RUF were three diamond merchants: **Ibrahim Balde** (also known as **Bah**), purportedly the RUF's principal contact with the diamond industry, and **Aziz Nassour** and **Sammy Ossaily**, two diamond middlemen based in Antwerp. Assisting the three was **Ali Darwish**, who rented a house in Monrovia as a base of operations, in which the two al Qaeda operatives were alleged to have stayed. The RUF officials alleged to have been involved were, besides Balde, RUF commander **Issa Sesay** and RUF spokesman **Gabril Massaquoi**. (U)

The diamond deals were facilitated by the government of Liberia, which had an interest in ensuring the RUF was successful against the Liberian President Charles Taylor's rival neighbor, the government of Sierra Leone. The Post also alleged that Liberian President Charles Taylor was paid a million dollars to shelter the two al Qaeda terrorists, and that Taylor furthermore was selling diamonds to al Qaeda. The Post also reported that **Fazul Mohammed** and **Ahmed Ghailani** were given refuge by Burkina Faso President **Campaore** after 9/11. (U)

The FBI investigation

Ruppert prepared a matrix of all the facts known and reviewed the written analysis that was available. Ruppert also met with Global Witness' **Yearsley**, who was very open and forthcoming, and the Washington Post's **Farrah**, who was not. (U)

9/11 Classified Information

Ruppert spent a week in Sierra Leone as part of two two-man teams. They conducted 25 interviews of individuals involved. He also traveled to Burkina Faso and Antwerp, Belgium as part of the investigation. (U)

Ruppert's first trip, in March 2003, was to DeBeers in South Africa to determine whether it had any evidence to substantiate these allegations. DeBeers had no first hand information. All of their information was derived from open source information, such as newspaper and internet articles, or from **Alex Yearsley**, who is an investigator for Global Witness, a non-profit advocacy group interested in the conflict diamond issue. DeBeers stated that there was no unusual activity in the raw diamond market in the summer of 2001, as alleged in the Washington Post. Ruppert stated that at one time DeBeers bought conflict diamonds to preserve its monopoly on the market, but has since stopped and is working to stop the trade in illegal diamonds. (U)

9/11 Personal Privacy

The allegations started as a result of Farrah developing a source, a man named [redacted] who claimed that two individuals indicted in the East Africa embassy bombing conspiracy -- Fazul Abdullah Mohammed and Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani -- were smuggled into Monrovia by Balde to meet with diamond merchants Nassour and Ossaily. [redacted] claimed that the men used the aliases of Mohammad D. Keneme and Soulemani M. Guessen, and produced a "Liberian Visa Waiver" to corroborate this claim [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] failed a US government-administered polygraph on the issue. The FBI determined that the Liberia Visa Waiver documents were false, in that Liberia never used such a document. Additionally, the FBI discovered that Nassour employed two Senegalese diamond merchants named Mouhamed Kenemi and Souley Guisse, (similar to the purported aliases of al Qaeda operatives Fazul Mohammed and Ahmed Ghailani). Individuals familiar with the two Senegalese diamond merchants looked at photos of the al Qaeda operatives and determined that they were not the same. Senegal is in West Africa, while the two al Qaeda operatives are from East Africa: Ghailani is Tanzanian and Fazul Mohammed is Kenyan. The FBI also doubted [redacted] credibility because before 9/11 he gave information to the US government in an attempt to receive asylum and refugee status, but had never mentioned the diamond/al Qaeda connection until after he met Farrah, which was after 9/11. (U)

Interviews of other participants

Samih Ossaily

Ruppert met with the Belgium National Police diamond squad (most of the rough diamonds are finished in a very small geographical area in Antwerp). [redacted]

9/11 Law Enforcement Sensitive

[redacted] a Belgian interview with Samih Ossaily, who was arrested in April 2002 by the Belgians for money laundering and procuring weapons for the RUF. Ossaily denied being part of any al Qaeda link and stated that his cohort, Nassour, was not even in Monrovia at the time he is alleged to have been meeting with the al Qaeda representatives. Ruppert characterized the Belgian investigation, which concluded that there were no al Qaeda connections, as very thorough. Significantly, the Belgians disputed many other aspects of the Post articles, including the scope of the diamond trading done by Balde, the bribes to and diamond sales by Charles Taylor, as well as a number of other details. The Post had cited either Belgian or European officials as sources. (U)

Ibrahime Balde

The FBI interviewed Balde in Burgina Faso. He adamantly denied any al Qaeda connection but admitted that he was involved in a weapons for diamonds trade on behalf of the RUF with Ossaily and Nassour. He also identified the two Senegalese diamond merchants as individuals working for Nassour. (U)

Aziz Nassour

The FBI was unable to interview Nassour, but obtained transcripts of a BBC interview of him. This interview is consistent with Balde statement: that he was involved in an illegal weapons for diamonds deal involving Ossaily and Balde. He also stated that the two Senegalese were diamond merchants, and were not the al Qaeda operatives as had been alleged. (U)

Ali Darwish

The FBI interviewed Ali Darwish, who admitted to leasing the Monrovia house as a base of operations. Prior to that, in January 2001, he had accompanied Ossaily and Nassour to a West African hotel and observed two African males meeting with Nassour. Darwish believes that he later recognized those two individuals from an FBI most wanted poster as al Qaeda operatives Fazul Mohamed and Ahmed Ghailani. Rupert doubts the identification because it was so suggestive (picking them out of a most wanted poster rather than a proper photo array) and because it was made well after the fact as a result of a one-time meeting. (U)

RUF leaders

The FBI interviewed [redacted] (identified in the FBI report only as a "former senior RUF official"). He identified Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan out of a group of photographs as someone who was introduced to him in November of 2000 by Balde, who was attempting to gain access to RUF commander Issa Sesay to buy diamonds. Balde denies this meeting ever happened. Additionally [redacted] stated he never saw the al Qaeda operatives Ghailani, Mohamed or Abdullah. (U)

The FBI reviewed the statements of Issa Sesay made to UN war crimes investigators. Sesay admitted engaging in a diamond deal with Ossaily, Nassour and Balde for money and equipment, and identified two Senegalese males as working for Nassour. The interview contained no information substantiating the al Qaeda allegations. (U)

FBI conclusions

As noted in the attached report, the FBI has concluded that the al Qaeda diamond connection does not exist. Rupert interviewed or examined the interviews of all of the major players, all of who deny any al Qaeda link. Rupert believes that the Post sources

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should not be relied upon: [redacted] is not credible and produced false evidence, and Darwish was mistaken as a result of poor identification techniques. Additionally, other facts contained within the articles are provably false, which casts significant doubt on the sources.

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