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Memorandum for the Record

Subject: Interview of Muhammad Jabber Hassan Fakihi
Location: Conference Palace, Riyadh
Interviewed by: Dietrich Snell (9-11 Commission) (DS)
Interpreter: [REDACTED] 9/11 Law Enforcement Privacy
Also present: S/A Jacqueline Maguire (FBI - Penttbon)
[REDACTED] 9/11 Law Enforcement Privacy
Col. Jaber (Mabahith)
Maj. Khalid (Mabahith)
Maj. Habib (Mabahith)
Interview Date: October 20-21, 2003
MFR Date: October 21, 2003

The interview commenced at approximately 10:10 pm with introductions and a brief explanation by DS of the Commission's mandate and mission, plus an expression of appreciation by DS to the interviewee, Muhammad Jaber Hassan Fakihi (Fakihi), for his willingness to be interviewed by the Commission. Fakihi - who was wearing traditional Saudi garb without headband (*iqbal*) - acknowledged DS's remarks in a cordial, though reserved and somewhat distant, fashion that persisted throughout most of the interview.

Background

Fakihi was born in Jizan, Saudi Arabia, in c. 1971 and attended primary and high school in Riyadh. Thereafter, he enrolled in the college of Business Administration of King Saud University, where he majored in Law, and from which he received his degree in c. 1995 (Hijra 1415).

Eight months after graduating from college, Fakihi obtained a job as a payroll accountant with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call, and Guidance in Riyadh. He still holds the same position with the Ministry.

Employment at KSA Embassy in Berlin

In c. June 2000, Fakihi was assigned to work at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Bonn, where he remained for approximately one month until relocating to Berlin with the rest of the Embassy staff. His duties with the Embassy involved administering the payroll of employees of the Ministry, including imams located in Germany (5), Holland,

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Vienna, and Denmark (2). He also was responsible for distributing korans and other printed materials to mosques within those countries. All told, the payroll for which he was responsible amounted to 18,000-25,000 SR (4800-6667 USD) per month and included a total of 15 mosque employees.

Fakihi didn't remember the names of all of the mosques for which he was responsible in Germany. While his practice was to do his payroll business by mail, he dealt in person with the imam of Al-Nur Mosque, the only mosque he visited, because it was located in Berlin.

Fakihi had no discretion to decide on the payment amounts he distributed; rather, he received a payment schedule from Riyadh and simply dispensed the required amounts and collected corresponding receipts for the imams. Most of his time was occupied by performing this payroll responsibility.

Fakihi's immediate supervisor was the Saudi ambassador. Within the Ministry, reported to Deputy Minister Abdul Aziz Al-Ammar in Riyadh. Al-Ammar, in turn, reported to Saleh Al-Ashaikh, the Minister, whom Fakihi has met in Riyadh on a couple of occasions.

Although Al-Nur Mosque, located in the Neukoelln section of Berlin, was about 30-45 minutes from Fakihi's home by car (Fakihi had his own vehicle and used to drive himself), he went to the mosque fairly regularly on Fridays to pray. The mosque itself was small when Fakihi arrived in Berlin, but moved into a larger facility close by shortly thereafter.

Fakihi first met the imam of Al-Nur, Salem El Rafei, about a month after arriving in Berlin. According to Fakihi, Al-Rafei did not publish any writings; nor did the imam make politically oriented statements. Rather, El Rafei would give lessons on Koranic interpretations in sessions held on Saturdays, some of which Fakihi himself attended, as did 150-300 other congregation members. Fakihi insisted that the lessons were not political in nature.

When asked about his involvement in supporting Islamic charities such as Al-Haramain, Fakihi smiled and said he was astonished at the notion that anyone would think that he could be responsible for supporting such an enormous entity, which, he said, supports itself without any

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government money. He denied having any duties at all in connection with charities.

Al-Haramain made a large contribution to Al-Nur Mosque about 2 years ago, defraying two thirds of the cost of the mosque's 2,700,000 DM purchase price for its new building. Fakihi heard about the contribution after the fact from El Rafei.

Fakihi's duties didn't extend to the development of mosques. During the course of his tenure in Berlin, many Islamic centers approached him with requests for assistance, and he would examine those requests, but could only provide them with printed materials. Fakihi fielded requests from mosques in such major German cities as Bonn, Frankfurt, Muenster, and Stuttgart.

When asked about reporting in the press that he had written Saleh Al-Ashaikh a letter advocating the development of mosques in Europe, Fakihi responded that he lacked authority to skirt the chain of command and write such a letter directly to the Minister. He does not remember writing any letter to the Minister. Specifically, Fakihi categorically denied the allegations in the following paragraph in the September 10, 2003 Wall Street Journal article by David Crawford as "totally untrue:"

Mr. Fakihi had big plans for Al-Nur. Shortly after arriving in Berlin in June 2000, he wrote a letter to the Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs in Riyadh, Saleh bin Abdulaziz Al-Ashaikh, proposing to turn the mosque into a center for Islamic missionary activity aimed at 'ethnic European' populations in Eastern Europe. The Journal reviewed a copy of the letter in Arabic and had it translated. Mr. Fakihi, who envisioned moving his office to the mosque, proposed that Al-Nur carry the word of Islam to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, the last of "which once belonged to the Islamic Caliphate under Ottoman empire rule."

Fakihi heard about the letter attributed to him from colleagues in Riyadh and was familiar with its contents from the Internet. His claim of having nothing to do with the letter did not appear credible.

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He also denied allegations in the press accusing him of assisting charitable organizations sympathetic to the cause of UBL. He doesn't suspect anyone of fabricating these charges against him, and is at a loss to explain their origin, claiming to be unaware of anyone who might wish him ill.

Asked specifically what he thinks of UBL, Fakihi stated that he considers UBL's actions "criminal" and "a defamation" of Islam. He claims not to know anyone who sympathizes with UBL.

According to Fakihi, he didn't socialize with people at Al-Nur Mosque. Politics occasionally would be discussed there, including some matters and incidents involving the US, but he denies participating in those discussions and maintains that he never paid much attention to what people involved those conversations would say.

During the bombing of Afghanistan, an Islamic country, people were especially displeased. He understands that the US was responding to the 9/11 attacks and professes to deplore the loss of many lives in those attacks. When asked whom he considers responsible for the 9/11 attacks, Fakihi appeared to become somewhat less at ease (frequent hand movements to mouth) and stated that he did not know. He said he did not see the video of UBL talking about the attacks with the "crippled Sheikh") a couple of months afterwards but read about it in the newspaper.

Fakihi was called back to Riyadh on March 22, 2003. On that Saturday, he was summoned by phone to see the Charge d'Affaires, Judai bin Hadal, while having coffee at a restaurant in the Embassy with Ahmad Al-Dubayan (see below). The Charge told him, without further explanation, to return to Riyadh the following day, and Fakihi complied. This was the first time he had ever been called back to Riyadh without any stated reason.

Two-three days after his return to Riyadh, Fakihi appeared at the Ministry and reported to Al-Ammar, the Deputy Minister, who told him to see Al-Ashaikh, the Minister. In his conference with the latter, Fakihi was told only to "sit still" for the time being. Fakihi did not ask any questions and took vacation for the next couple of months.

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Fakihi has been suspended from further work abroad. He remains very surprised by this action, which he considers unfair, and still has not received any official explanation for it. He does not believe he did anything wrong. He appears to hold the newspapers, especially Der Spiegel, responsible for his fate and considers himself the victim of journalistic fabrication. He has no idea who might want to harm him by making up stories such as those that have appeared in the press. Fakihi doesn't know if his recall originated from the Ministry or from the German government.

Meeting with Motassadeq

When the interview turned to Fakihi's relationship with Mounir El Motassadeq, Fakihi became more animated, increasing the number and duration of hand movements to his beard and face. Clearly having anticipated this subject, he, for the first time in the interview, gave an extended narrative answer to the question whether he knew Motassadeq. He first met Motassadeq^{*} in Berlin at an *iftar* (Ramadan fast-breaking) held at the home of Abu Ayman, a friend from the mosque, on December 23, 2001. Fakihi had been to Abu Ayman's house previously.

Motassadeq arrived at the *iftar* in the company of El Rafei and one or two others (including El Rafei's brother), while the meal was already in progress. Fakihi emphasized that, unlike El Rafei and himself, Motassadeq had not been invited by Abu Ayman to the *iftar*, which some 10-13 people attended.

After the meal concluded, El Rafei introduced Fakihi to Motassadeq as being from the Embassy. Fakihi recalls hearing Motassadeq's first name, Mounir (which he thought was Lebanese, like El Rafei), but claims he was not really paying much attention during their brief conversation. Understanding from El Rafei that Motassadeq was interested in obtaining korans for his own mosque, Fakihi provided Motassadeq with his business card and said that Motassadeq should fax him a letter setting forth his needs. Fakihi denies that his encounter with Motassadeq had anything to do with any attempt by the latter to leave Germany.

* Fakihi identified, albeit somewhat tentatively, a photograph of Motassadeq (#8), noting that he believes Motassadeq had a beard when they met. In the photo shown Fakihi, Motassadeq is cleanshaven.

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Following Motassadeq's arrest -- which Fakihi read about in *Der Spiegel* - El Rafei explained to him that Motassadeq had been living in Hamburg and had come to Berlin for only a couple of days.

Other Associates

Fakihi denies ever meeting a Tunisian named Ihsan Garnooui, although he recalls hearing at the mosque about an "Ihsan" who previously lived in Berlin and who supposedly was returning to Germany.* Fakihi read in the press - either Der Spiegel or an Arabic publication -- about Ihsan's arrest after returning to Riyadh.

Fakihi described Ahmad Al-Dubayan as someone he knew well. Al-Dubayan helped Fakihi learn his job when Fakihi arrived in Bonn. After the Embassy was moved to Berlin, Al-Dubayan was promoted to the position of Director of the Islamic Center in London. Al-Dubayan occupies a Grade 12 position, whereas Fakihi is only a Grade 6. Although Al-Dubayan, like Fakihi, is responsible for payroll administration in London, he is affiliated with Imam University rather than the Ministry. Fakihi last saw him the day before returning to Riyadh last March. He does not recall whether he spoke to Al-Dubayan about being recalled.

Miscellany

Fakihi denies ever being convicted of embezzlement, as alleged in Der Spiegel.

His foreign travel includes trips to Denmark, Prague, India (vacation and uncle's business recruiting nurses to come to the KSA - 1995-96), Indonesia (vacation, since 1996), the UAE, and Bahrain. He denies ever traveling to Pakistan or Afghanistan.

At the conclusion of the interview, Fakihi was shown photographs of Said Bahaji (2), Abdelghani Mzoudi, Ziad Jarrah, Ramzi Binaslhibh (2), Zakaria Essabara, Marwan Al-Shehhi, and Muhammed Atta. He denies ever having met any of these individuals, and recognized the photos of Binalshibh, Essabar (whom he mis-identified as Binalshibh),

* At this point in the interview, Fakihi appeared to become a bit more nervous, crossing his arms for the first time.

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Al-Shehhi, Bahaji, and Atta only from seeing them in the newspapers.

The interview concluded at approximately 1:30 am. The FBI representatives asked no questions, but supplied all of the photographs shown Fakihi. The Mabath officers occasionally engaged in brief exchanges with Fakihi in Arabic during the interview.