

~~SECRET~~

Commission Sensitive

Memorandum for the Record

Subject: Interview of Osama Basnan
Location: Conference Palace, Riyadh
Interviewed by: Dietrich Snell (9-11 Commission) (DS)
Interpreter: 9/11 Law Enforcement Privacy
Also present: S/A Jacqueline Maguire (FBI - Penttbom)
9/11 Law Enforcement Privacy
Col. Jaber (Mabahith)
Maj. Khalid (Mabahith)
Maj. Habib (Mabahith)
Interview Date: October 21-22, 2003
MFR Date: October 22, 2003
MFR Prepared By: DS

(C) The interview commenced at approximately 10:00 pm. At the outset, DS established that the witness, Osama Basnan, wished to use an Arabic-English interpreter for the interview. Throughout the interview, Basnan demonstrated that he understood the questions being asked of him in English and, for the most part, responded immediately before waiting for any translation. Although he responded primarily in Arabic early in the interview, he increasingly answered in English as the interview progressed.

(S) The interview failed to yield any new information of note. Instead, in the writer's opinion, it established beyond cavil the witness' utter lack of credibility on virtually every material subject. This assessment is based on: the witness' demeanor, which engendered a combination of confrontation, evasiveness, and speechmaking, presumably for the benefit of his Mabahith audience; his repudiation of statements made by him on prior occasions; and the inherent incredibility of many of his assertions when viewed in light of the totality of the available evidence. Accordingly, this MFR contains only a general summary of his statements, and, in the writer's judgment, should not be used the basis for any factual assertion by the Commission.

The witness decided to use an interpreter despite having declined this option in his prior interviews by US law enforcement authorities on August 22, August 23, October 11, and November 20, 2002.

~~SECRET~~

1

Commission Sensitive

~~SECRET~~

Commission Sensitive

(2) DS began by expressing appreciation to Basnan for his voluntary appearance for an interview. DS then described the Commission - its statute and mission - for Basnan and asked whether Basnan had any questions on this subject. Basnan responded by asking whether the Commission's report would "tell how I've been mistreated" and recount exactly what he told the Commission. DS responded by stating that the Commission would listen to what he had to say, but that his statements would have to be considered in light of all of the other evidence amassed during the Commission's investigation before any decision could be made as to what would appear in the report. Basnan stated that he understood and was willing to proceed with the interview.

(2) Background

Born in Mecca, Basnan worked for several years at a Saudi Arabian airline, starting while he was still in high school. Thereafter, he worked for 9 months to a year for SAPTCO, a bus company in Saudi Arabia.

In 1981, he went to the US to pursue further education, having missed the opportunity to attend medical school in Jeddah due to a botched hernia operation (in Saudi Arabia). In the US, he attended Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, CT; Consement (ph) College in Worcester, MA; Sacramento City College; and California State University in Los Angeles. His studies included art, graphic design, and computer science. Although initially without any scholarship, he eventually received funding from the Saudi government when he achieved sufficiently high grades.

In the 1980s, he resided in the Falls Church/Alexandria, VA area and established his own used car business, which consisted of buying cars at auction and shipping them to Saudi Arabia for re-sale at a handsome profit. His business declined when larger players entered and dominated the used car market. He returned to Saudi Arabia after Saddam invaded Kuwait and remained there for the duration of the Gulf War.

When Basnan returned to Virginia following the war, he married Majeda Dweikat, his third marriage. (Basnan's two prior marriages were both brief. The first was to a Saudi

~~SECRET~~

2

Commission Sensitive

~~SECRET~~

Commission Sensitive

Arabian woman; the second to a US citizen, with whom he had a son.) Repeatedly during the interview, Basnan cited Dweikat's health problems [REDACTED] a preoccupation for him.

(C) 1992 Fairfax County Car Seizure

When asked about his ties to the contents of a car found in 1992 by the Fairfax County Sheriff's office, Basnan claimed that the car was part of the inventory of his used car business and that he was not responsible for the materials it contained. Confusingly, he insisted that the car became an issue only because it had been parked on Wisconsin Avenue near the residence of the then Secretary of State. He claimed to have parked the car in that location because it was near a friend's clothing business, where he provided assistance from time to time. He denies familiarity with any of the jihadist literature found in the car.

DS called to Basnan's attention the fact that the car was seized by the Fairfax County Sheriff, and asked whether it might have been parked in Virginia. Basnan replied that this was possible, since he sometimes parked cars at the old community center for Saudi students.

He said he was first confronted with the contents of the car during his interviews with law enforcement in 2002.

(C) 1992 Sheikh Rahman Party

With respect to the reporting of Basnan's having hosted a party in Washington, DC in 1992 for Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman (the "Blind Sheikh"), Basnan maintained (as in his final law enforcement interview in the US, on November 17, 2002) that this was a case of mistaken identity. Specifically, he claimed to have employed the services of a sheikh - selected at random from a list of over a dozen Al-Azzar graduates (all of whom dressed alike and wore dark glasses) - to preside at a party marking the 7th day of his son's birth, and that the sheikh who performed the ceremony was not Sheikh Omar at all and could see. Basnan contends that a CIA agent came to his house shortly after the party and agreed with him that the sheikh who had attended was not Sheikh Omar.

~~SECRET~~

3

Commission Sensitive

~~SECRET~~

Commission Sensitive

(C) San Diego

When Basnan's wife (Majder Dweikat) developed a severe
9/11 Personal Privacy Basnan could not afford proper treatment
and, because he "knows the system," approached the "health
attache" in the Saudi Embassy for assistance. He received
a number of referrals and ultimately selected a Dr. Bolvet
(sp?) at the University of California at San Diego. Basnan
moved his family to San Diego, staying first at a hotel and
then moving into an apartment on Beadnell Way. Thereafter,
Basnan divided his time between San Diego and Virginia,
where he maintained an office near Walter Reed Boulevard
for his car business. While in Virginia, Basnan attended
the Dar Al-Hijra Mosque.

Basnan denies that he was involved with the Islamic Center
of San Diego (ICSD), and expressed marked resentment toward
the ICSD leaders for failing to welcome him to the
community. He claims to have had much closer community
ties in Virginia, where the leaders were an elderly
Egyptian and then a Moroccan, both of whose names Basnan
said he does not remember.

When asked about reporting that he was considered to be the
informal mayor ("omda") of the Islamic community in San
Diego, Basnan at first purported not to understand the
question and then allowed as how the title stemmed from his
reputation in the community for never cheating anyone and
for being "so adorable" [sic]. He then, however, claimed
not to have any friends at all in San Diego and insisted
that he devoted himself to caring for his wife and extended
family when not spending time smoking a hukka pipe at a
shop called Fumari.

Basnan at denied knowing Mohdar Abdullah at all and claimed
to have identified his photograph in jail only as someone
he had seen at the ICSD. Basnan likewise claimed not to be
familiar with Omer Bakarbashat, while conceding to know who
he is.

At this point (approximately 11:45 pm), a break was taken,
in part to permit Basnan to obtain some refreshments.

When the interview resumed, DS spent several minutes
explaining to Basnan that he should not attempt to distance

~~SECRET~~

4

Commission Sensitive

~~SECRET~~

Commission Sensitive

himself from or minimize his prior contact with individuals whom he knew while in San Diego. He was told repeatedly that the Commission was not accusing him of complicity in the 9/11 conspiracy, but rather that his assistance was being sought to improve the Commission's understanding of the circumstances surrounding the San Diego phase of the plot. DS explained further that Basnan's refusal to acknowledge firmly established facts appeared to indicate that he had something to hide, and only made him look guilty.

Basnan said that he grasped DS's message, and finally conceded the possibility that Bakarbashat may have called him from prison after 9/11, although that "doesn't mean I talked to him."

With ever mounting hostility, Basnan then launched into an extended speech about how shabbily he believes himself to have been treated by the US, which he claims he "loves." In Basnan's words, "I helped America more than I got from it." He also insisted that he helped build the community, and that he could name 25 "high level Americans" of all races who would vouch for him; yet, he failed to provide any names of such individuals.

When asked about Omar Al-Bayoumi, Basnan volunteered that their only link was through telephone records documenting frequent contact between their wives. Claiming not to know Al-Bayoumi at all, he blamed him for failing to uphold the Arab tradition of staging a welcome feast to celebrate Basnan's arrival to San Diego.

In one of the many contradictions that pervaded the interview, Basnan professed to have been too busy with his assorted wife's health problems to deal with the community in San Diego. This "ailment" theme eventually carried over to Basnan himself, as he complained bitterly about the way he was treated at the time of his arrest and attributed some unspecified nerve problem in his leg to the tribulations he claimed to have suffered as a result of his arrest and incarceration. His tirade included the statement "I lost my human rights in that jail." In response to a question whether he had a lawsuit pending on this issue, Basnan replied, "I'm not going to tell you."

~~SECRET~~

5

Commission Sensitive

~~SECRET~~*Commission Sensitive*

When asked about his observation of Nawaf Al-Hazmi and Khalid Al-Mihdhar in San Diego in early 2000, Basnan said he didn't remember ever seeing them or ever telling anyone that he had seen them.

Finally, after another speech by Basnan about the injustice he claims to have suffered, DS read the following statement, verbatim, from the FD-302 reporting on the FBI's August 23, 2003 interrogation of Basnan:

Basnan also positively identified photographs of Nawaf Al-Hazmi and Khalid Al-Mihdar [sic] as the two hijackers who lived in San Diego, California, near Basnan and Basnan personally observed attending the Mosque (known to the agents to be located at 7050 Eckstrom, San Diego, California) with Bakarbashat. Basnan denied ever meeting either Al-Hazmi or Al-Mihdar.

Asked whether the above statement was true, Basnan categorically denied ever saying what was attributed to him in the report.

At this point, DS told Basnan that he saw no point in continuing the interview and thanked him for his time. The interview concluded at approximately 12:30 am.

~~SECRET~~*Commission Sensitive*