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MR04019368

Memorandum for the Record

Event: Interview of [REDACTED]

Location: Sanaa, Yemen

Date: 29 February 2004

Access Restrictions: None

Commission Participants: Dieter Snell
Raj De

Non-Commission Participants: [REDACTED]

Foreign Representatives: Col. Abdul-Khaliq M. Al-Silwi (MOI)
Lt. Col. Nabil Al-Sanaburi (PSO)
Mr. Hassan Taha (PSO)

Interpreter: [REDACTED]

Prepared By: Raj De

Reviewed By: Dieter Snell

The interview was originally scheduled for 28 February 2004 but was rescheduled for the next morning upon the request of Commission staff. The interview was conducted at the Police Officers Club in Sanaa, Yemen. [REDACTED] was present at this location when Commission staff arrived. The interview started at approximately 10:30 am and ended at approximately 12:40 pm. As the FBI had an interview request pending for [REDACTED] SA [REDACTED] led the interview. Commission staff followed-up with additional questions as needed. [REDACTED] used an interpreter for both questions and answers during the entire interview.

After introductions and pleasantries – in which [REDACTED] responded to the interviewers' expressions of appreciation for his agreeing to meet by saying "It is my duty" – [REDACTED] discussed his relationship with Ramzi Binalshibh. [REDACTED] stated that Binalshibh had been his neighbor in Yemen. After the civil war in Yemen in 1994, Binalshibh left for Germany. At that time, [REDACTED] said he [REDACTED] was only about 17 years old. According to [REDACTED] Binalshibh returned to Yemen once or twice after moving to Germany. [REDACTED] said that during one of these visits, he saw Binalshibh in passing on the street. [REDACTED] said that he had no greater relationship with Binalshibh other than having lived next door to him several years ago.

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[redacted] said that he and Binalshibh had been neighbors in the al-Hasabah district of Sanaa. Binalshibh moved next door to [redacted] residence sometime in 1992-93, but [redacted] was not sure of the exact date. [redacted] said he first met Binalshibh during the one to two year period during which they were neighbors, before Binalshibh moved to Germany.

Binalshibh's mother lived next door to [redacted] in the same residence as Binalshibh, and she remained in the same home after Binalshibh left for Germany. Binalshibh returned to Yemen to visit her. Binalshibh's mother died roughly one year ago. Binalshibh's brother Ahmed also lived at this residence with their mother. In fact, Ahmed still lives there with his wife today. [redacted] however, was not sure whether Ahmed lived at this address at the same time Binalshibh lived in Germany. [redacted] did not know whether Binalshibh had any other brothers.

[redacted] said that he did not spend much time with Binalshibh when he lived next door. He would only see him on the street when he was going to the store, etc. [redacted] said that Binalshibh was six or seven years older than himself. In view of this age difference, Binalshibh and he were really not that close. For instance, because of the age difference, he and Binalshibh did not attend school together. [redacted] said he did not know where Binalshibh went to school. [redacted] said that he did not know if Binalshibh had a job, and that he did not have a close enough relationship with Binalshibh to know who were his friends. [redacted] said he only knew that Binalshibh went to Germany after the war to study, which would have been sometime before the end of 1994. He said that he did not know whether Binalshibh participated in the Yemeni civil war, or what his political leanings were at the time. He also did not know whether Binalshibh had traveled outside of Yemen prior to going to Germany. He was not sure why Binalshibh chose to study in Germany, or whether Binalshibh considered going to any other countries. [redacted] said that he only found out that Binalshibh had gone to Germany after he had already left from a shopkeeper at the local grocery store.

[redacted] claimed to have seen Binalshibh only once since then, when [redacted] ran into Binalshibh on the street. When asked if he ever had any phone contacts with Binalshibh after he left, [redacted] explained that because Binalshibh's mother did not have a phone, she had asked [redacted] whether Binalshibh could call her at [redacted] house when he wanted to reach her. Binalshibh would therefore call [redacted] s house and ask to speak to his mother, and whoever answered the phone would get her from next door. [redacted] said that his only phone contact with Binalshibh would have been on such occasions, and it would only have been to exchange pleasantries.

[redacted] could not remember when Binalshibh started calling his number to reach the mother. [redacted] confirmed that [redacted] is his phone number and is the number that Binalshibh used to call. [redacted] however, did not recognize the phone number [redacted]. When told that this number belonged to a phone in the building next to his, where Binalshibh's mother lived, and that Binalshibh had called this number from Germany as well, [redacted] reiterated that Binalshibh's mother did not have a phone at the time and that this number must have belonged to somebody other than Binalshibh's mother. [redacted]

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[redacted] explained that the building in which Binalshibh's mother lived was divided into flats, so the phone number must have been assigned to one of the other flats in this building.

[redacted] said that his entire family used the phone in his house, and that the number he identified earlier still belongs to him (he and his family continue to live at the same place as when Binalshibh was their neighbor). He could not recall when Binalshibh last called the number, nor could he say how many times Binalshibh called looking for his mother, as others may have answered the phone on occasion. He said that was personally aware of at least two or three calls from Binalshibh. [redacted] did not recognize the following phone number [redacted].

[redacted] said he had no other contacts with Binalshibh after the latter left for Germany other than these calls and the one time he ran into Binalshibh on the street. Although he was not sure, he guessed that Binalshibh had returned to Yemen to visit his mother when they ran into each other. [redacted] could not recall when this meeting occurred, but he thought it happened after he got married in 1997. He guessed it therefore must have been around 1998. [redacted] noted that this encounter with Binalshibh was brief. Although he could not recall precisely what was said, he recalled Binalshibh commenting that [redacted] had grown up and had gotten married since they last saw each other. When asked whether the calls from Binalshibh occurred before or after this meeting, [redacted] said he thought that the calls occurred both before and after this visit. [redacted] was unaware of any other visits Binalshibh made to Yemen other than this one after Binalshibh moved to Germany.

[redacted] presented [redacted] with a copy of a fax sent by Binalshibh in August 2000 to the Florida Flight Training Center (FFTC), in which Binalshibh listed a post office box number and [redacted] name as his point of contact in Yemen. [redacted] denied that he or anyone in his family had such a post office box, but he said he would be willing to ask his relatives if they recognized the box number on Binalshibh's fax. [redacted] said that he had not known until then that Binalshibh ever used him as a point of contact, and he had no idea why Binalshibh did that. [redacted] also had no explanation why his name and number were listed as the point of contact on a piece of paper found during a search conducted in Germany. [redacted] said he never gave Binalshibh permission to use him as a point of contact.

Returning to the phone calls [redacted] at first said that the phone that Binalshibh called is registered under his name, as the oldest male of his household. He later corrected himself, noting that the phone is actually registered under his father's name, Abdullah. Although he is still alive, Abdullah is very old and had no relationship with Binalshibh. [redacted] stated once again that Binalshibh's mother asked for permission for her son to call her on his phone, and that he himself had never had a relationship with Binalshibh. Although his family would usually not allow others to use their phone, he said that he allowed Binalshibh's mother to receive calls from Binalshibh simply out of respect for her. [redacted] said he could not recall when Binalshibh's calls started or ended.

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[redacted] said he could not recall any visit by Binalshibh to Yemen in 2000. When he was reminded by [redacted] that Binalshibh called [redacted] phone on 1 August 2000, that Binalshibh sent two faxes to the FFTC with [redacted] listed as his point of contact on 8 August 2000 and 10 August 2000, and that it appears that Binalshibh flew to Yemen for about one month on 18 August 2000, [redacted] conceded that he might in fact have seen Binalshibh on two separate occasions, but he had no specific memory other than the one encounter he related earlier about running into Binalshibh on the street. [redacted] again claimed not to have had any relationship with Binalshibh, noting that he would not have been the one to welcome Binalshibh when he visited Yemen. [redacted] denied knowing with whom Binalshibh would have associated when he came to visit.

When asked about Binalshibh's brother Ahmed, [redacted] said he did not know anything about his relationship with Binalshibh. Specifically, he did not know whether Binalshibh and Ahmed kept in touch after Binalshibh had moved to Germany. Although [redacted] conceded that he knows Ahmed better than he knew Binalshibh, he claimed not to have been particularly close to Ahmed either. Ahmed is older than Binalshibh, and thus even less of a direct peer of [redacted]. [redacted] said that the extent of his relationship with Ahmed is simply to exchange greetings on the street. He did not know where Ahmed worked or whether he had ever traveled outside Yemen.

[redacted] said he did not know whether Binalshibh had a brother named Abdullah. He also said he had never heard of a friend of Binalshibh's named [redacted]. Moreover, [redacted] said he did not know Binalshibh to ever use any other names, such as "Omar" or "Ahed Sabet." Finally, [redacted] did not recognize post office box number [redacted].

At this point in the interview, all took a ten minute break.

When asked specifically if he ever heard of Binalshibh working at a bank, [redacted] said no. He added that he never had any reason to ask Binalshibh about his work, or whether he even had a bank account. [redacted] said he knew nothing of Binalshibh's religious beliefs, reiterating that when Binalshibh left for Germany, [redacted] was only 17 years old. He did not recall Binalshibh ever mentioning Sheikh Zindani. [redacted] said that Binalshibh was known as a quiet person who was not very social. [redacted] also said that he only learned that Binalshibh applied for a U.S. visa from the media after 9/11; he was not aware that Binalshibh applied for a U.S. visa as early as 1995. [redacted] did not even know that Binalshibh was interested in studying abroad until after Binalshibh left for Germany. He claimed, however, that it was not particularly unusual for people from his community to travel abroad for medical treatment or to study.

Upon further questioning, [redacted] conceded that he may have seen Binalshibh more than once after he left for Germany. He may have seen him two or three times, but he now recalled seeing him at least twice. He said that the encounter he mentioned earlier was the first time he saw Binalshibh after Binalshibh left for Germany, which was about four years after he moved away. [redacted] said Binalshibh did not look any different when he saw him. Although he insisted that he not recall the details of the conversation they had on the street some five years ago, he did remember that Binalshibh said he was

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studying accounting in Germany. When asked specifically [redacted] said Binalshibh did not mention anything about traveling to Afghanistan or Chechnya, or about any interest in flight school.

[redacted] said he did not know any of the following individuals: Mohamed el-Amir, Mohammed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi, Abu Kaka, Abdul Rahman (he noted that this is a very common name, but said he did not know of anybody with this name connected to Binalshibh in Germany), Ziad Jarrah, Abu Tariq, Ould Slahi, Abu Musab, Zakariya Essabar, Abu al-Magrebi, Mounir el-Motassadeq, Abdelghani Mzoudi, Karim Mehdi, Haydar Zammar, or Said Bahaji.

[redacted] was asked to look at the photos in the Penttbom book. He did not recognize any of the pictures other than from the news, except for two photos of Binalshibh (#21 and #36). He said that the first picture looked like Binalshibh as he knew him (no beard), and that he recognized the second picture only from television. [redacted] said that the picture he recognized of Binalshibh is how he looked both before he left for Germany and when he came back to visit Yemen.

[redacted] proceeded to question [redacted] specifically about each of the calls made to his phone that were reflected on Binalshibh's phone record. [redacted] had no memory about any of the calls in particular. Before he was presented with the actual phone record showing the specific times and dates of the calls, however [redacted] said that sometimes Binalshibh would call and ask for his mother and then call back a few minutes later [this pattern is in fact reflected on the phone record]. [redacted] appeared to have no difficulty reading the record but said that he did not remember any specific calls because they were not especially important to him; he would just answer the calls and exchange pleasantries before getting Binalshibh's mother.

[redacted] said that he would never have allowed Binalshibh to use his phone to call his mother if he had known that Binalshibh was going to do something bad. He said that he feels terrible that Binalshibh basically used him, and that he was willing, and considered it his duty, to help if he had any relevant information.

At the end of the interview [redacted] was asked about some of his personal information. He was born in Hijra 1398 (1978) and is 26 years old. [redacted] finished high school in 1996 and had attended university in Sanaa. He studied accounting, and he had only two courses remaining in order to receive his degree. He said he now worked with his father as a construction contractor.

When asked about his travel abroad [redacted] at first said he had traveled only to Saudi Arabia for Hajj and for Omra. He said he had traveled for Hajj one time three years ago, and for Omra three separate times, once in 1996 as well as each of the last two years. When pressed further as to whether he had ever traveled outside Yemen other than those four times, and specifically whether he had ever been to Bosnia [redacted] admitted that he traveled to Bosnia in 1995. He was generally reluctant to discuss the details of this trip, and during the questioning he repeatedly referred us to the PSO, whom he said had

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prepared a detailed report on his travel to Bosnia. [redacted] said he spent three months in Bosnia after high school, but by the time he arrived the Dayton agreement was already in place so the fighting was basically finished. He said he did not go through any training other than training for general fitness. [redacted] said that he had been inspired to go by a neighbor named Abdul Nasser, who died fighting in Bosnia in 1995 at the age of 30.

[redacted] did not believe that Abdul Nasser knew Binalshibh. Although some people from the area knew that he had traveled to Bosnia, he said he never told Binalshibh, who had moved to Germany before [redacted] went to Bosnia. [redacted] said he never spoke with Binalshibh about the latter having traveled to Chechnya, Afghanistan, or Pakistan. In response to specific questioning [redacted] denied that he himself had ever traveled to Chechnya, Afghanistan, or Pakistan either.

9/11 Personal Privacy