INTERVIEW WITH FBI WHISTLEBLOWER SIBEL EDMONDS

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By Khatchig Mouradian, The Armenian Weekly, 21 August 2009

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Edmonds, an FBI language specialist, was fired from her job with the FBI's Washington Field Office in March 2002. Her crime was reporting security breaches, cover-ups, blocking of intelligence, and the bribery of U.S. individuals including high-ranking officials. The "state secrets privilege" has often been invoked to block court proceedings on her case, and the U.S. Congress has even been gagged to prevent further discussion.Edmonds uncovered, for example, a covert relationship between Turkish groups and former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), who reportedly received tens of thousands of dollars in bribes in return for withdrawing the Armenian Genocide Resolution from the House floor in 2000.

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Born in Iran in 1970, Edmonds received her BA in criminal justice and psychology from George Washington University, and her MA in public policy and international commerce from George Mason University. She is the founder and director of the National Security Whistleblowers Coalition (NSWBC) and in 2006 received the PEN/Newman's Own First Amendment Award. She speaks Turkish, Farsi, and Azerbaijani.

Below is the full transcript of the follow-up interview.

Khatchig Mouradian—I asked you in 2007 what had changed during the five years since 2002, when you first contacted the Senate Judiciary Committee to reveal the story on Turkish bribery of high-level U.S. officials. You said, "There has been no hearing and nobody has been held accountable. We are basically where we started…" Two more years have passed, we have a new president, and I have to ask the same question again. Has there been any change?

Sibel Edmonds—Nothing has changed. As far as the Congress is concerned, the Democrats have been the majority since November 2006 and I have had zero interest from Congress on having hearings—any hearings—on this issue, whether it's the states secrets privilege portion of it or the involved corruption cases. The current majority has been at least as bad as the previous one. At least the Republicans were gutsy enough to come and say, We're not going to touch this. But the new majority is not saying anything!

The Obama Administration is pretty new. For what I see, they are continuing the previous administration's state secrets privilege policies. As far as the whistleblower protection and related legislations are concerned, the new White House has already made it clear that they do not want to provide any protection for national security whistleblowers—these are the whistleblowers from the FBI, CIA, and all the other intelligence and law enforcement agencies and, of course, the Defense Department.

As far as the mainstream media is concerned, at least from what I have seen, the situation has actually gotten worse. To me that seems to be the major reason behind the Congress' and the White House's inaction and lack of desire to pursue accountability. As long as the pressure from the mainstream media is not there, of course they aren't going to act. They are driven by that pressure, and the mainstream media in the U.S. today does not fulfill its role and responsibility by providing that pressure.

Of the three—Congress, the executive branch, and the media—I would say the biggest culprit here is the mainstream media.

K.M.—The most recent example of the deafening silence of the mainstream media was your deposition during the Schmidt vs. Krikorian case on Aug. 8. There, you spoke, under oath, about how the Turkish government and a network of lobby groups and high-ranking U.S. officials and Congressmen have engaged in treason and blackmail. A big story by any standards, it was only covered by Armenian newspapers and a few blogs. How do you explain this silence?

S.E.—I know field reporters who are so excited and want to chase the story. But when they went to their papers—and I'm talking about mainstream media and very good investigative journalists—their editors are refusing to touch it. When you watch the video or read the transcript, you will see how explosive the deposition was. And remember, I was speaking under oath. If by any standard, if I were to lie or be untruthful in any way, I would go to jail. I am answering these questions under oath, and yet, the mainstream media is refusing to touch it. And this is very similar to what we saw with the

AIPAC/Larry Franklin case.

I have emphasized the fact that the American Turkish Council , the Turkish lobby, and these Turkish networks, they work together, in partnership with AIPAC and JINSA . So not only is there pressure on media outlets from the Turkish lobby and the corrupt U.S. persons involved, but they also have this pressure placed on the media via their partners from the Israel lobby—and the latter's influence on the mainstream media in the U.S. is undeniable.

The irony is that my deposition has made it to the front page of Turkish newspapers—and Turkey doesn't even pride itself with freedom of the media—yet the mainstream media has not written a single word about it.

K.M.—In an article you wrote about the 4th of July titled, "It Ain't about Hot Dogs and Fireworks," you say: "Recall the words of the Constitution Oath that all federal employees, all federal judges, all military personnel, all new citizens are required to take, step back, and pay special attention to these lines: 'support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies—foreign and domestic.' Now ask yourself who is meant by 'domestic' enemies."

Talk about these "domestic enemies."

S.E.—The domestic enemies I refer to are the U.S. officials, whether elected or appointed, who do not represent the interest of the American people—whether they are national security or foreign policy-related interests—and instead, they represent their own greed, their own financial benefit and/or foreign interests. A good example here is Dennis Hastert.

Less than three years after Vanity Fair ran a story about Hastert's covert relationship with Turkish groups, Hastert's group announced that it's the registered lobbyist for the government of Turkey receiving, $35,000 a month from the Turkish interests. How much more vindication does the American mainstream media want? This man, for years, cashed in while he was under oath to be loyal and represent American interests and the Constitution. While in Congress, this man was not only representing foreign governments, but also foreign criminal entities. As soon as this man got out of Congress, he came out of the closet and officially became a representative of foreign interests. Bob Livingston is another example. As soon as he got out of Congress, he registered under FARA to represent foreign interests. Steven Solarz is yet another example.

Another prominent example is Mark Grossman at the State Department. For years, he has been representing foreign entities. In fact, he's been violating criminal laws in the U.S. And guess what? He leaves the State Department in 2005 and he's immediately placed on the payroll by a company in Turkey called Ihlas Holding, and he goes and joins a lobby and starts representing Turkish entities' interests.

These opportunities do not come when these people leave their offices. In order for these people to secure these jobs and lucrative payments, they have to serve these foreign entities while they are in

office. And they have done just that!

The victims here are the American people, their national security, and the integrity of this government. And in many cases that I know about, it is about our national security-related, intelligence-related information that is being easily provided to foreign entities by these individuals. Based on the laws we have since the beginning of this nation, these people should be prosecuted criminally.

K.M.—I am reminded of the saying, "God protect me from my friends, and I'll take care of my enemies." Isn't Turkey supposed to be an ally of the U.S.?

S.E.—If you were to go and see our government's own latest report, under the espionage section, the top countries are Israel, China, with Turkey coming third or fourth. You are looking at two ally countries here, Israel and Turkey, penetrating and stealing our intelligence, military, and classified technology information. Why would your allies penetrate your State Department, Department of Defense, and get away with it? Why would your allies want to steal from you?

K.M.—Let's talk about the Krikorian vs. Schmidt case. Specifically, why did you decide to testify and what can you say about the efforts to block your testimony?

S.E.—I was contacted by Mr. Krikorian's attorneys, who said they wanted to receive my sworn testimony and also depose me as a witness on the case they had in court. I went and checked out their case, and I saw that it involves the Turkish lobby and certain Turkish interest groups, and also, a Representative, Jean Schmidt , who was receiving campaign donations from these groups. I saw, based on the publicly available information from their case that there was a pattern, and decided that my testimony would be directly relevant and extremely important to this case, despite the fact that I did not have any information specifically about Schmidt (I left the FBI in 2002). So I said yes, if they were to subpoena me and officially ask for my deposition under oath, I would provide it for them.

And then I fulfilled my obligation, as a former FBI contractor who has signed various non-disclosure agreements, to inform the FBI and the Department of Justice that I have been requested to provide my testimony and I am supposed to let you know. They had a day or so to respond. They passed the deadline. And after the deadline, they came back with some whimsical unconstitutional warning saying that under the non-disclose agreement, the FBI and the Department of Justice needed 30 days to review what I was about to testify. I had the attorneys check that and it turned out this is not legal, because oral testimony cannot be submitted—you don't know what is going to be asked in court. Therefore, the warning they gave me was unconstitutional and not legal. They didn't have any legal grounds to stop me from testifying, so I went and, under oath, during this five-hour long deposition, answered all the questions, and talked about everything I knew that had to do with Congressional corruption cases that involved various Turkish entities.

K.M.—For years now, this has been a very frustrating issue for you. Have you given up at this point? Is

there any hope for change?

S.E.—On the micro level, I have given up. I have done everything anybody could possibly think of, whether it's approaching the Congress, the court, the Inspector General's office, the mainstream media, or providing testimony under oath. There's nothing left to do. It is what it is. It's being blocked.

On the macro level, I am a U.S. citizen and I am a mother. I have the obligation, the responsibility, to defend the Constitution when it's my part, my role, to make a difference. And for that, I will never give up. In the U.S., we are witnessing many elements of what we consider a police state. I expect that in countries like Iran, Turkey, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia. But we're looking at these elements in the U.S., a nation that prides itself at being at the forefront of freedom, democracy, and civil liberties. What happened to that nation?

As a mother, I want to raise my daughter in a place where she feels free to express her opinion. She is right now in a country where her mother has been silenced with gag orders and state secrets privilege.

I grew up with these and I don't want my daughter to grow up with these.