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**Memorandum for the Record**

Subject: Plotters Meeting with Mabahith  
Location: Conference Palace, Riyadh  
Participants: Philip Zelikow (9-11 Commission)  
Dietrich Snell (9-11 Commission)  
Tom Powers (FBI Legatt)  
Nael Sabha (FBI Legatt)  
EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d)  
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EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d)

Interview Date: October 17, 2003  
MFR Date: October 19, 2003

The meeting, which immediately followed the Commission Staff's interview of Omar Al-Bayoumi, commenced at approximately 1:30 am. Most of the statements by the Mabahith officers were in Arabic, EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) served as the primary interpreters, with EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) occasionally performing such service as well.

EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) introduced the two junior officers, EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) as the most knowledgeable members of his staff with respect to the Mabahith's investigation of the 15 Saudi hijackers.

PZ gave a brief description of the Commission's work and it was agreed that the US and Saudi Arabian sides are working for mutual benefit.

**Overview of Mabahith's Analysis**

EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) provided an overview summary of the Mabahith's analysis of the 15 hijackers, which he described as a peer group and representative of a category of the substantial Saudi contingent of veterans of the Afghanistan-USSR war. After the war concluded with the fall of Kabul, some mujahideen returned to their countries to resume normal lives. Some returnees, however, failed to adjust to the social conditions they now found at home. A third group remained in Afghanistan and participated in the civil war that continued there.

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The Gulf War constituted a major contributing factor to the inability of the second group to readjust following their return. The liberation of Kuwait had proved costly, and Saudi Arabia (KSA), in particular, was now considerably poorer than it had been when they had left. This circumstance, combined with the extensive media coverage of conditions in other theaters such as Bosnia and Chechnya, caused many mujahideen to want to resume fighting.

In the mid-90s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) stripped UBL of his citizenship, an event that sparked an effort by Al-Qaeda to recruit members who would oppose the Saudi government. This recruiting effort targeted young men of limited education, and used the fighting in Bosnia and Chechnya as its principal selling points. The recruits would be sent to Afghanistan for training and, once there, would be assessed for their potential as Al-Qaeda operatives. The selection process proceeded in stages, with the pledge of loyalty representing the final stage. Afghanistan, in effect, became a trap for the KSA and US, turning against both of them despite all the aid both countries had provided.

EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) described the Jamaat Tablighi as a recruiting entry point that advocated a more peaceful agenda involving charitable and missionary work outside the KSA. From its ranks, however, recruits leaning toward jihad were selected.

Two principal camps existed: Khaldan (near Jalalabad), which was open to all recruits, and Faruq (near Kandahar), which concentrated the elite Al-Qaeda recruits.

At this point in the meeting, EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) began a detailed presentation of the Mabath's investigation of the family backgrounds of the 15 Saudi hijackers. The investigation, which continues, has involved interviews of parents, neighbors, colleagues, and teachers, plus searches of the families' homes for relevant documents. None of the 15 had any record for extremist or takfiri activity. Their lives were relatively normal, and they tended to have become religious only recently. Some, such as Salem Al-Hazmi and Satam Sugami had minor offense criminal records.

The families of all 15 are considered to have been law abiding and good citizens. Their initial reaction, following 9/11, was disbelief that their sons could have



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been involved in the attacks. Conflicting early reports, such as that of the supposed recovery of the passport of Sugami at the WTC, only heightened the uncertainty for some families. Only after a few months - and especially after the appearance of the UBL video in which he discussed the attacks with the crippled sheikh - did the families abandon their denial.

On the video, UBL makes statements to the effect that some of the 15 did not know they were on a suicide mission. There does not appear to be any clear consensus on this point.

Although some of the 15 had telephone contact with their families after they were recruited, none ever revealed his whereabouts, and all family contact ceased within about 6 months of 9/11. The lone exception, Al-Haznawi, appears to have used Marwan Al-Shehhi's Visa card to phone his aunt and, according to Al-Haznawi's brother, inquire about the health of their sick mother. The lack of family contact is particularly striking when one considers that many of the 15 had to return to the KSA to obtain their US visas. KSM appears to have imposed a blanket prohibition against family contact, a prohibition violated by Al-Hamlan.

The visa photos of the 15 are striking for the before/after contrast they present, as all 15 changed shaved their beards and wore western attire. EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) showed us such before/after photos of Hamza Al-Ghamdi.

The youth and limited education of the recruits made them particularly susceptible to brainwashing practiced by the more senior Al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan. The Mabahith emphasized the contrast between the atmosphere inside the KSA (where jihad was portrayed as a noble, positive cause), and outside (where the recruits embraced extremist ideology for the first time and isolated themselves from their families).

To counteract the temptation that 9/11 operatives might experience to return to their families, the plot called for them to be sent at least in pairs to obtain their visas. For example, Al-Hamlan, Ahmed Al-Nami, and Wail Al-Shehri traveled together for this purpose.

Recruitment of the 15 Saudi 9/11 hijackers reflected a pattern of diversion to Afghanistan, isolation,

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brainwashing, and finally conversion to takfiri ideology, a twisted "al-takfir al-hijira" (repudiation and withdrawal) philosophy similar to that espoused by Shukri. The repudiation process was to start by branding the rulers as infidels whose commands no longer needed to be obeyed. Thereafter, the repudiation spread to the whole society and even the recruits' families. Ultimately, it became not merely acceptable to spill the blood of such infidels; it became a duty.

This indoctrination tended to focus on the personal vices of the rulers as a basis for rejection in favor of the end goal of achieving a true Islamic state through force. Any supporter of the regime was an enemy, including the US.

Each recruit was studied carefully to determine those specific character traits that would make him most vulnerable to manipulation.

#### Comparative Analysis of the 15 Saudi Hijackers

The Saudi hijackers were all between the ages of 21 and 26, most having either a high school education or less. All but 2 of them were single, and the 2 who were married had done so only recently. All except Wail Al-Shehri (a physical education teacher in southwestern SA) were unemployed. (Any government employment would be considered a sin.) Waleed and Wail Al-Shehri came from the wealthiest family of all the hijackers.

Although none of the 15 had any record for extremist activity, Ahmed Al-Nami (drugs) and Salem Al-Hazmi (adultery, drinking, glue sniffing, reckless driving) did have minor criminal records. Moreover, all 15 had traffic offenses.

Wail Al-Shehri suffered from severe depression. His younger brother, Waleed, told the family that he intended to obtain treatment for Wail in Medina.

The Mabathith's investigation further established that a substantial number of the 15, including Al-Haznawi, Said Al-Ghamdi, Majed Moged, Hani Hanjour, and others, isolated themselves and became religious 2-4 months before they left the KSA.

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The video "Russian Hell" (believed to have been produced by Al-Qaeda) on Chechnya was widely distributed and a powerful recruiting tool. The video tended to be shown to small groups by extremist sheikhs (like Abu Ma'ali and Abu Hasna, aka Abu Muaz Al-Jiddawi (currently in jail in the KSA)) and in charitable fundraising booths at supermarkets. Recruits responding to the video generally would follow the ostensible route to Chechnya through Turkey and, finding the route blocked, would be diverted to Afghanistan for training.

Yemen was particularly popular for transit to Afghanistan, and was used repeatedly by Nawaf Al-Hazmi (NAH) and Khalid Al-Mihdhar (KAM). Other frequently used routes involved Syria-Iraq and Qatar-Iran-Iraq. Such circuitous were necessitated by the screening performed by the KSA of anyone wishing to travel to Pakistan, ever since UBL's 1996 declaration of war. Travel to London - now considered a hotbed for terrorist activity - is scrutinized now as well.

The Mabahith recently arrested 2 more Al-Qaeda recruiters.

A requirement for true jihad is parental permission, which, according to the Mabahith, none of the 15 obtained. *[Given his family history, it seems inconceivable that Al-Mihdhar didn't have such permission.]* Some of the 15 asked for permission, were refused, and went anyway. Indeed, on separate occasions, Nawaf's father traveled to Yemen and to Karachi to retrieve his son. The recruiters invoked the fatwa of Abdullah Azzam, which purported to supersede the permission requirement by making jihad a duty.

Family interviews established that KAM knew NAH from junior high school. The name (but not the photo) of Al-Haznawi was identified by Hamza Al-Ghamdi's family as a friend who visited Hamza.

None of the families of the 15 were aware that their sons were being recruited, and none have identified anyone as being responsible for pushing their sons to go to Afghanistan.

Even before 9/11, many families brought their sons in to have them straightened out by speaking to the Mabahith. Family members of Moqed, Alnami, and Waleed Al-Shehri told the Mabahith that they would have turned their sons in had they been aware of their sons' intentions.

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By 1999, NAH had a relationship with Mikbil Al-Wati (?) a Yemeni extremist (now deceased) responsible for inspiring the 1979 attack on the Grand Mosque. As a result of this relationship, NAH was watch-listed; but he never returned to the KSA, and had his brother carry his passport for him.

The Mabahith already has passed EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) all the information it has accumulated in its ongoing investigation of the hijackers' backgrounds. It agreed that the Commission could have access to all of this material.

Miscellany

Al-Hamlan is still in custody.

Al-Hawsawi is not considered Saudi because he hales originally from Nigeria and somehow managed to obtain a Saudi passport. His true identity remains uncertain, because the Mabahith has been unable to provide any prior record of him. (The Mabahith stated that such uncertainty is typical for African emigrants.)

In response to a question from PZ, EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) stated that the Mabahith started to consider UBL dangerous after the 8/90 invasion of Kuwait, when UBL offered to use his own army to eject Sadaam and, more importantly, when UBL began to set up training camps in the Sudan. UBL's refusal to comply with the Minister of the Interior's order to return to the KSA - which his uncle communicated to him - caused UBL to be stripped of Saudi citizenship. At this point, dealing with UBL became a crime in the KSA.

The Mabahith is not aware of the details of the attempt to kill UBL in the Sudan, and suggests we pursue the subject with Prince Turki in London.

UBL's activities became increasingly subversive, right up to the point where he joined forces with Zawahiri. The Al-Qaeda of 9/11 reflects Al-Qaeda's merger with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which effectively hijacked Al-Qaeda.

The Mabahith also considers the Baluchis to constitute an important component of Al-Qaeda. Examples include KSM, Ramzi Yousef, and Yousef's brother Ammar Al-Baluchi.

EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) is not aware of any evidence supporting Lorie Mylroie's theory that Yousef was an Iraqi



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intelligence operative. Mamdouh Salim represents an important Iraqi connection.

EO 13526 Secs. 1.4(c) and 6.2(d) now considers Im-Fakih (?) in London to be very dangerous, similar to UBL.

Plans for Al-Bayoumi

The last portion of the meeting involved an extended discussion of the current status of Al-Bayoumi, not that the Commission has interviewed him. The Mabahith would like to see him cleared. PZ and DS noted that the question of his willingness to submit to a polygraph test remains outstanding (although implementation of such a test, as Legatt Powers pointed out, would be problematic). In any event, the Commission likely would not be in a position to issue statements of exoneration prior to the publication of its report in May 2004.

The meeting concluded at approximately 4:30 am.

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