

FBI Agent Who Refused To Tape Al-Arian Is Suspended

by Michael Fechter
The Tampa Tribune
March 4, 2003

A Muslim FBI agent, twice accused of refusing to tape-record conversations with terrorism financing suspects, has been suspended and ordered back to the United States from the American Embassy in Saudi Arabia.

FBI officials declined Monday to comment. The suspension of agent Gamal Abdel-Hafiz was first reported last week by ABC News.

The former lead investigator into the possible terrorist ties of fired University of South Florida Professor Sami Al-Arian said Abdel-Hafiz hurt that inquiry by refusing to record a conversation with the professor in 1998.

Al-Arian, indicted Feb. 20 on charges of helping to finance and run the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, had pressed Abdel-Hafiz for details about the case when the two met at a conference in Washington, said the former investigator, Barry Carmody.

He asked Abdel-Hafiz to follow up the encounter with a secretly recorded telephone call, Carmody said Monday. Abdel-Hafiz refused. He'd talk to Al-Arian, he said, but he wouldn't record the conversation without Al-Arian's knowledge.

"That's outrageous," Carmody said. "That defeats the whole purpose."

Federal agents in Chicago claim Abdel-Hafiz did the same thing in a separate case two years later. Carmody and his Chicago counterparts complained to FBI headquarters. Despite that, Abdel-Hafiz became the FBI's legal attache at the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Carmody said the suspension was "long overdue. I don't think he should have gone to Riyadh in the first place."

In the Chicago case, Abdel-Hafiz would not allow colleagues to eavesdrop on a conversation with a terrorist financing suspect, said Mark Flessner, a former assistant U.S. attorney leading the investigation. Abdel-Hafiz said he would not secretly record a fellow Muslim, Flessner said.

"I was shocked to hear that an FBI agent wouldn't participate in an undercover investigation for religious reasons," Flessner said Monday. "That's just not an option."

mfechter@tampatrib.com

Copyright 2003 The Tribune Co. Publishes The Tampa Tribune

FAIR USE NOTICE: This site contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts

to advance understanding of criminal justice, political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.