

# Who are the good guys?

## FBI at odds with some of its Muslim agents

By STEVE MCGONIGLE  
Staff Writer

**A**mong the multitude of observant Muslims who traveled to Mecca last year for the annual hajj pilgrimage were the FBI's two resident agents in Saudi Arabia.

The weeklong trek was undertaken at the invitation of Saudi government officials as a showing of good will and to obtain information from high-level law enforcement sources, one of the participating U.S. agents said.

But instead of being viewed as a coup by their FBI superiors, the hajj trip by the two Muslim agents was met with suspicion. Soon after their return, the FBI began an inquiry into complaints that questioned the agents' loyalties, one agent said.

"The rumors start to come from headquarters that we've both gone native, that we're both Muslims, and this office will never do a good job for the bureau," said Gamal Abdel-Hafiz, the FBI's assistant legal attaché in Riyadh until February.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz, who now lives in Flower Mound, said complaints about the Riyadh office were part of a pattern of harassment by FBI supervisors bent on settling personal scores with him. He also said that the FBI culture places more value on compliance and conformity than on successful results.

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LAMBERTO ALVAREZ/Staff illustration

## Stirring up big money, big media, big politics

Kim Bartley and Donnacha Briain are two Irish filmmakers who interest in Venezuelan

The documentary, which opened Friday at the Angelika in Dallas, shows how Mr. Chávez's

the opposition and portraying it as a wa minority unwilling to

views expressed in the documentary, therefore endangering its em-

ter our trips, which made us really want to find out more about

# After Mecca, agents under suspicion

COLUMN 3

COLUMN 4

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Mr. Abdel-Hafiz attributed his firing in May and Agent Rattigan's transfer from Riyadh in June to headquarters supervisors with whom the two agents had clashed.

"Everything in headquarters is based on personal things," he said. The top priority and the best interest of the U.S., that's No. 2. Personal things are No. 1."

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz was terminated for not disclosing his role in a lawsuit on his 1993 job application. FBI documents show. The omission was a misunderstanding and could have been forgiven by the FBI, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz maintained.

The FBI declined to comment on Mr. Abdel-Hafiz's allegations, citing a pending appeal of his dismissal and his stated intention to file a lawsuit if he is not reinstated.

Ed Cogswell, a spokesman in Washington, said the bureau had conducted a "special inspection" of the Riyadh legal attaché office last year, but he did not respond to repeated requests for details or copies of any inspection report.

The FBI declined requests to interview Roderick Beverly, the special agent in charge of the legal attaché program, and several other headquarters supervisors named by Mr. Abdel-Hafiz as critics of the Riyadh office's performance.

The Dallas Morning News was able to confirm independently that the two Riyadh agents told other federal officials about the

taining higher supervisory positions in the FBI.

Agent Youssef's complaints have drawn the attention of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, which is investigating broader allegations that the FBI routinely retaliates against whistleblowers in its ranks. Agent Rattigan, who was reassigned to a supervisory agent's position in the FBI's New York field office, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

According to Mr. Abdel-Hafiz, Agent Rattigan has a pending administrative complaint alleging religious and racial discrimination by several FBI supervisors.

The legal attaché program to which Agent Youssef, Agent Rattigan and Mr. Abdel-Hafiz were assigned is part of the FBI's international operations. Agents are assigned to U.S. embassies and act as liaisons with local law enforcement.

The Riyadh FBI office was opened to enhance cooperation between U.S. and Saudi authorities after a 1996 bombing in Dhahran in which 19 American service members were killed.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz was the first temporary attaché. Agent Youssef succeeded him. Agent Rattigan arrived in Riyadh as assistant attaché in 1999 and became head of the office upon Agent Youssef's departure in 2000.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz, who had been assigned to an international terrorism squad in the Dallas FBI office, returned to Riyadh in February 2001, he said.

for information from other FBI offices around the world. More than 1,000 requests came in during the first 10 days, he said.

Agent Rattigan immediately requested more agents, but it took almost two weeks before the first reinforcement arrived, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said. Agent Rattigan later complained about a supervisor being sent to Riyadh before another agent was, he said.

**#3** In February 2002, Agent Rattigan requested a face-to-face meeting with his supervisors in Washington. It was during that meeting that he announced his conversion to Islam and that he was contemplating a discrimination complaint, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

"Things went to hell in a basket after that," he said.

**#4** Criticism from headquarters became a daily occurrence, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said, after he and Agent Rattigan returned from the week-long hajj ceremonies in Mecca.

The trip was not to fulfill religious obligations, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

**#5** "All our contacts are there, and we meet with them and we talk to them. You sit and you talk, and you just shoot the breeze while there is no pressure for work, and they tell you a lot of things that they normally don't say," Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

Nonetheless, a supervisor in Washington filed a complaint with more than two dozen accusations of inappropriate behavior and incompetence, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz

not, he said.

"She felt like this was too much clutter, and we have too much paperwork," Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

**#2** He said he and Agent Rattigan later had to ask Saudi officials for additional copies of the documents that were destroyed before they were even translated.

**#3** The shredded documents were copies of "electronic communications" from the Riyadh agents waiting to be uploaded into the FBI's computer system, he said. Destroying them prematurely, he said, was a violation of FBI procedural rules.

Buck Revell, a former deputy associate FBI director, agreed that it was improper and possibly illegal to shred documents before they were computerized or translated.

"Literally, you can't destroy information that is in the possession of the government until... its value and its significance have been properly determined, he said, "and obviously whether or not it should be retained for official purposes."

"If I was still in position, and I heard of that," Mr. Revell said, "I definitely would have an investigation."

While Agent Rattigan reported the shredding incident to FBI headquarters, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said, no disciplinary action was taken against the visiting supervisor.

In November, two months after the temporary supervisor left Riyadh, a three-person team arrived to conduct what was called a quick



MONA REEDER/Staff Photographer

**Gamal Abdel-Hafiz of Flower Mound was fired from the FBI last year.**

Taping the witness, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said, was unnecessary and could have destroyed his credibility with other investigative sources if it became known. He said his bosses in Dallas concurred with his decision to refuse to do the taping.

The FBI was aware at the time it issued its statement to news organizations in December that Mr. Abdel-Hafiz was under investigation by the bureau's internal disciplinary unit because of insurance fraud allegations made by his former wife.

Bertie Abdel-Hafiz, a resident of North Richland Hills, told The Dallas Morning News earlier this month that she told the FBI early last

interview Roderick Beverly, the special agent in charge of the legal attaché program, and several other headquarters supervisors named by Mr. Abdel-Hafiz as critics of the Riyadh office's performance.

The Dallas Morning News was able to confirm independently that the two Riyadh agents told other federal officials about the two administrative inquiries.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz's criticisms echoed some of the allegations of a discrimination lawsuit filed in July by Bassem Youssef, another native-Arab agent who served as the FBI's first permanent liaison officer in Saudi Arabia.

Despite his language skills and cultural expertise, Agent Youssef's suit contends, he was relegated to a minor role in the 9/11 hijackings investigation and blocked from at-

temporary attaché. Agent Youssef succeeded him. Agent Rattigan arrived in Riyadh as assistant attaché in 1999 and became head of the office upon Agent Youssef's departure in 2000.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz, who had been assigned to an international terrorism squad in the Dallas FBI office, returned to Riyadh in February 2001, he said.

By the time he arrived in Riyadh, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said, Agent Rattigan was already clashing with his superiors. Agent Rattigan accused a deputy assistant FBI director of consorting with a prostitute on a visit to the United Arab Emirates, he said.

The complaint triggered an internal disciplinary investigation of the deputy assistant director, Les Kachiban, but he remained Agent Rattigan's boss, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

The day of the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said he was told that Mr. Kachiban said of Agent Rattigan, "Now let us see if his brothers are going to help him."

Mr. Kachiban, who recently left the FBI for an executive position with a major insurance company, said he had no formal calls or communications with Mr. Abdel-Hafiz. He said he did not recall the details of the case, but he said he was "impressed with the way

most with them and we talk to them. You sit and you talk, and you just shoot the breeze while there is no pressure for work, and they tell you a lot of things that they normally don't say," Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

Nonetheless, a supervisor in Washington filed a complaint with more than two dozen accusations of inappropriate behavior and incompetence, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

Among the accusations, he said, were that he and Agent Rattigan abandoned their office during hajj, that Agent Rattigan was wearing a Saudi thobe to the office, and the lead agent had provided prostitutes to agents in Riyadh on temporary assignment.

Perhaps the most serious accusation was that the two liaisons were sitting on hundreds, maybe even thousands, of investigative leads, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

The FBI's Inspection Division never visited Riyadh, he said, but spent three months interviewing at least 20 agents assigned there on temporary duty.

None of the allegations were substantiated, he said. "Not one."

One month after he first came to Riyadh, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said, he learned a new round of inspection by a Chicago agent. Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said he was not given any legal training.

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In November, two months after the temporary supervisor left Riyadh, a three-person team arrived to conduct what was called a quick inspection, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

"They wrote about 10 things that need to be taken care of, and they are all administrative stuff, and they are done before the report even came" regarding the inspection, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

While the report criticized the office had handled some of its duties, the inspectors also recommended that the number of agents and support staff be more than doubled to handle the workload, Mr. Abdel-Hafiz said.

In December 2002, the FBI issued a prepared statement praising Mr. Abdel-Hafiz's performance and calling him a valuable agent in Riyadh.

The statement followed news media inquiries into accusations that Mr. Abdel-Hafiz, who was then assigned to the Dallas FBI office, had refused a Chicago agent's request to tape-record a Muslim cleric about terrorist financing.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz did not deny giving to the Chicago agent that "a Muslim does not record another Muslim." But he said he was discussing a common perception in the Muslim community, not his personal belief.

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Bertie Abdel-Hafiz, a of North Richland Hills, Dallas Morning News ear year that she told the FBI e year that her former l staged a burglary of their F home to collect \$25,000 i ance benefits.

The burglary occurred Mr. Abdel-Hafiz was hired FBI, but a lawsuit he and filed against their insurer was pending when he work for the bureau as a tr in New York, court records.

Mr. Abdel-Hafiz did no lawsuit on his employer cation. He said his wife vided that he did not nee cause the case was settled a trial.

His former wife said sh ed to disclose the allege scheme out of bitterness her former husband, who c her in 1996.

Her allegations were t for the decision for fire Mr Hafiz.

While awaiting the out his appeal, Mr. Abdel-I seeking a private investi- gence and writing a manus a possible book.

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