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No Translation Needed

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The FBI made a last-minute attempt to derail a "60 Minutes" interview with a whistle-blower who worked for the bureau.

On Friday afternoon, Oct. 25, attorneys for Sibel Edmonds received a fax from FBI public affairs chief Michael Kortan, saying Edmonds was required to get prior approval before talking to CBS correspondent Ed Bradley.

Edmonds, who had already taped the interview, ignored the letter. The former wiretap translator told Bradley, as she had told The Washington Post in June, that many documents in terrorism investigations aren't translated because of incompetence and corruption. Edmonds is suing the FBI over her subsequent firing.

"They wanted the '60 Minutes' show not to air," Stephen Kohn, Edmonds's lawyer, says of FBI officials. "They didn't want to be criticized. They called it a 'setup.' . . . On the eve of when the show was to air, they come in screaming national security. It was pure public relations. What it accomplished was scaring my client and making her extremely nervous and very upset."

In the FBI fax, Kortan warned that Edmonds signed an agreement as an employee that "expressly prohibits disclosure (without prior approval from the Director of the FBI or his delegate) of information acquired as part of the performance of her contract."

Kortan says in an interview there was no attempt to kill the story. "She was just reminded of her obligations that were part of her contract with the FBI," he says. While Kohn says the non-disclosure agreement is generally invoked only for books and articles on national security, Kortan says its use is "not uncommon" for television interviews.

The bureau also waited weeks -- until that Saturday -- to give "60 Minutes" a brief comment about FBI officials taking the whistle-blower charges seriously, which Bradley added to the end of his piece.

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