KILL THE MESSENGER
FRENCH TITLE: UNE FEMME À ABATTRE
A FILM BY MATHIEU VERBOUD AND JEAN-ROBERT VIALLET
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Out of love for her newly-adopted country, Sibel Edmonds agreed to join the FBI as a translator in the wake of 9/11. But her world gets turned upside-down when Sibel reports wrongdoings to her supervisors: one of her colleagues from the Translation Unit is secretly working for the same Turkish officials who are “targetted” by the top-secret FBI investigations that Sibel is working on. As a “reward” for her whistle-blowing, Sibel is fired from the FBI. Today, she is fighting for the very ideals that American democracy relies on, and is facing, against overwhelming odds, some of the most reckless and powerful officials in the U.S. government.

Sibel has granted a film crew full and exclusive access to document her story, and her struggle, as we zero in on her “secret”. KILL THE MESSENGER (UNE FEMME À ABATTRE) is a true spy story about the only American citizen who dared stand up to the FBI in an attempt to expose the truth on some specific yet hidden aspects of today’s War on Terror and give the American people the protection and security the U.S. government has failed to provide.
A Word From The Film-Makers

Mathieu Verboud and Jean-Robert Viallet recently directed “Tranquility Bay” (90’), aired on France 2 in May 2006. The film was also broadcasted by TSR (Switzerland), SBS (Australia) and other international TV networks. The film, awarded with the 2006 Mitrani Prize by FIPA, was selected by some of the world’s most renowned film festivals like IDFA 2005 (Amsterdam) and Thessaloniki (Greece).

Making a 90 minute documentary film about someone carrying state secrets is obviously tempting. But when one discovers that nothing that Sibel learnt at the FBI can really be publicly discussed, one enters a world of paradoxes, the world of Sibel Edmonds…

The U.S. government’s claim is that the Edmonds’ case is without merit, but at the same time, alleges that exposing it would compromise national security.

Sibel Edmonds has quite an opposite view: silence and classification can only put the country at great peril. Facts and evidence exist which need to be exposed.

In this case, the only person determined to speak out cannot do so. This overridding factor, not to say this obstacle, has forced us to engage in creative thinking and look more closely.

In the Name of National Security

In the film, one truth soon becomes apparent: since 9/11, the U.S. is run like a banana republic. Be it Islamic terrorism or Iraq, the Executive Branch manipulates evidence and intelligence and breaks the law, all in the name of “national security”.

Sibel Edmonds lives in a great democracy but at the wrong time. The Bush administration is one of the most warmongering and secretive in the country’s history.

Scandals are innumerable, and the many dissenting voices in the intelligence community face retaliation and dirty campaigns, a situation highly reminiscent of the McCarthy era. Sibel Edmonds is not the only one to face this ordeal but few Americans have ever been subjected to the civil rights violations of the “State Secrets Privilege”.

The Sibel Edmonds “Movement”

Another element of truth hit us: there is a movement behind Sibel. The young Turkish-American has real public backing. Most of her supporters are kept in the dark about what she knows. Yet, they all understand what is at stake: in a country where every citizen has to “report suspicious activity,” one person is forbidden from coming forward — a complete contradiction of America’s most sacred First Amendment right: freedom of speech.

Revelations

In a film about a woman who holds State Secrets, one will naturally expect new revelations. These revelations appear in the last segment of the story. Astounding revelations, which go well beyond the simple theft of secret documents. And contrary to U.S. government claims, this is no small matter. The film casts an eerie light on some “aspects” of the U.S. foreign policy, and certain “deals” with supposedly allied countries.

The road to Sibel Edmonds’ secret was a rocky one. But we experienced unexpected support from many U.S. intelligence officers. Regardless of any political divide, impervious to pressures, these “patriots”, as they brand themselves, side with Sibel.

What some of them know about the “Edmonds’ case” is huge… and can only be matched by their amazement at the current state of affairs in Washington. All of them praised Sibel for her courage. Sibel Edmonds is the only U.S. individual who has dared to challenge the Bush administration on its favorite topic: National Security.

In this film, we would like to bring a special mention to Daniel Pearl. This journalist paid the ultimate price for his courage to go to Pakistan looking for answers to questions he had, like some others at the time. Among them, Sibel Edmonds.

Mathieu Verboud and Jean-Robert Viallet
Born in Iran, but of Turkish descent, Sibel Edmonds, 32, is recruited by the FBI as a language specialist a few days after 9/11. Her job is to translate FBI counter-espionage and counter-terrorism wiretap conversations recorded on American soil. FBI targets are individuals suspected of espionage and terrorism-related activities.

Sibel speaks fluent Turkish, Farsi and Azerbaijani. She is among the many translators hurriedly recruited by the intelligence community in the wake of the September 2001 attacks. In the 8 years after the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, the translation backlog has increased phenomenally: 350,000 hours of documents are in waiting.

Edmonds has no idea that the wiretap conversations she has to translate are a big smoking gun. They are so “sensitive” that the FBI had decided to “forget” about them. Before 9/11, the reason for that was easy: no translators! After 9/11, the argument is discarded. The American people want to know the truth about the attacks. New funds are pledged and the FBI has no choice but to reopen certain investigations and hire translators. Sibel starts working with the FBI on September 20th, 2001.

What she discovers is mind-boggling. The targets of FBI wiretaps are not only foreign individuals suspected of espionage and terrorism in the U.S. but also their accomplices, that is… top officials at the State Department and at the Pentagon. These people are clearly engaged in criminal activities such as technogical espionage, nuclear black market, heroin trafficking, money laundering, corruption of high-ranking officials, particularly in the U.S. Congress. The threat to U.S. national security is all too obvious. The perfect example of the explosive, not to say impossible, investigation.

Two months after she joined the FBI, Sibel is approached by one of the organizations under FBI investigation. The emissary is no stranger to Sibel: it’s a woman of Turkish origin, like Sibel, and also Sibel’s colleague at the Translation Unit. Sibel immediately understands: the spies whose conversations she translates everyday have infiltrated the FBI. Sibel reports to supervisors. Her nightmare is about to begin…

Sibel is just about to be fired, threatened, victimized. Very soon, she is put under a gag order. The Attorney General, John Ashcroft, invokes a rarely used privilege, namely the “State Secrets Privilege”. Her case is now considered top secret classified and a matter of national security, which requires that the courts block all related investigations. If she speaks, she’ll face prison. Ashcroft has cited two reasons for invoking this “Privilege”: “to protect certain sensitive diplomatic relations” and “to protect certain foreign business relations of the United States!” At the time, the Bush administration has its eyes fixed on Saddam Hussein and Baghdad. And there’s no point in letting a young “disgruntled” interpreter add other names to the cost of “bad guys” in the region. Particularly if these bad guys originate from allies or friendly states.

With the “State Secret Privilege”, the Edmonds’ case is gone but the “Edmonds’ affair” is just about to start. Sibel is now 36. In the past five years, with the backing of tens of thousands of Americans petitioning in her favor, she has engaged in a fight with Condoleezza Rice, pressed charges on several counts against the FBI and the Justice Department, petitioned the Supreme Court, called the Bush administration’s national security policy a cover-up and a big lie. So far, the government has prevailed but Sibel has paved the way for future investigations which may arise after the fall of the Bush cabal… Those investigations would show the involvement of certain famous, if not infamous, Neoconservatives in arms trafficking, and nuclear black market activities. “Connect the dots and follow the money,” say observers familiar with Sibel’s case.

In April 2006, Sibel Edmonds is presented with the 2006 PEN/Newman’s Own First Amendment Award. She has gained the recognition of this prestigious writers and journalists organization, who are long-time supporters of the freedom of expression. When on stage facing a standing ovation, the young Turkish-American, who settled in the U.S. at the early age of 18, still remembers her father’s last words: “Sibel, you’ll have to decide how you want to live your life. According to fear or according to your principles…”