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Lawyers try to gag FBI worker over 9/11

By Andrew Buncombe in Washington

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The Bush administration will today seek to prevent a former FBI translator from providing evidence about 11 September intelligence failures to a group of relatives and survivors who have accused international banks and officials of aiding al-Qa'ida.

Sibel Edmonds was subpoenaed by a law firm representing more than 500 family members and survivors of the attacks to testify that she had seen information proving there was considerable evidence before September 2001 that al-Qa'ida was planning to strike the US with aircraft. The lawyers made their demand after reading comments Mrs Edmonds had made to *The Independent*.

But the US Justice Department is seeking to stop her from testifying, citing the rarely used "state secrets privilege". Today in a federal court in Washington, senior government lawyers will try to gag Mrs Edmonds, claiming that disclosure of her evidence "would cause serious damage to the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States".

Mrs Edmonds, 33, a Turkish-American who had top secret security clearance, claimed this month that while working in the FBI's Washington headquarters, she saw information proving senior officials knew of al-Qa'ida plans to attack the US with aircraft months before the strikes. She has provided sworn testimony to the independent panel appointed by President George Bush to investigate the circumstances surrounding 11 September.

Mrs Edmonds was subpoenaed by the law firm Motley-Rice, which represents hundreds of families who are taking civil action against a number of banks and two members of the Saudi royal family for allegedly aiding al-Qa'ida.

Her lawyer, Mark Zaid, said last night: "The FBI wants to shut her up completely." He said it was ridiculous to claim that everything Mrs Edmonds knew had national security implications. Rather, he said, the FBI wanted to silence his client to save its embarrassment.

The Bush administration has been put on the back foot by allegations that senior officials - perhaps even Mr Bush himself - were provided with considerable information warning of an imminent attack by al-Qa'ida and that they failed to act. Mrs Edmonds said yesterday: "What are they are afraid of? If I am not allowed to give evidence, the families will not get the information I have; that will be that."

She said it was wrong for the Bush administration to claim it wanted a full investigation. "If there is

transparency, there is going to be accountability and that is what they don't want."

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