

ated with a particularly radical faction within the community of local worshippers, and had a network of contacts in other cities in the United States. After 9/11, Thumairy's conduct was a subject of internal debate among some Saudi officials. He apparently lost his position at the King Fahd mosque, possibly because of his immoderate reputation. On May 6, 2003, Thumairy attempted to reenter the United States from Saudi Arabia but was refused entry, based on a determination by the State Department that he might be connected with terrorist activity.¹²

When interviewed by both the FBI and the Commission staff, Thumairy has denied preaching anti-Western sermons, much less promoting violent jihad. More to the point, he claimed not to recognize either Hazmi or Mihdhar. Both denials are somewhat suspect. (He likewise denied knowing Omar al Bayoumi—a man from San Diego we will discuss shortly—even though witnesses and telephone records establish that the two men had contact with each other. Similarly, Thumairy's claim not to know Mohdar Abdullah is belied by Abdullah's contrary assertion.) On the other hand, Thumairy undoubtedly met with and provided religious counseling to countless individuals during his tenure at the King Fahd mosque, so he might not remember two transients like Hazmi and Mihdhar several years later.¹³

The circumstantial evidence makes Thumairy a logical person to consider as a possible contact for Hazmi and Mihdhar. Yet, after exploring the available leads, we have not found evidence that Thumairy provided assistance to the two operatives.¹⁴

We do not pick up their trail until February 1, 2000, when they encountered Omar al Bayoumi and Caysan Bin Don at a halal food restaurant on Venice Boulevard in Culver City, a few blocks away from the King Fahd mosque. Bayoumi and Bin Don have both told us that they had driven up from San Diego earlier that day so that Bayoumi could address a visa issue and collect some papers from the Saudi consulate. Bayoumi heard Hazmi and Mihdhar speaking in what he recognized to be Gulf Arabic and struck up a conversation. Since Bin Don knew only a little Arabic, he had to rely heavily on Bayoumi to translate for him.¹⁵

Mihdhar and Hazmi said they were students from Saudi Arabia who had just arrived in the United States to study English. They said they were living in an apartment near the restaurant but did not specify the address. They did not like Los Angeles and were having a hard time, especially because they did not know anyone. Bayoumi told them how pleasant San Diego was and offered to help them settle there. The two pairs then left the restaurant and went their separate ways.¹⁶

Bayoumi and Bin Don have been interviewed many times about the February 1, 2000, lunch. For the most part, their respective accounts corroborate each other. However, Bayoumi has said that he and Bin Don attempted to visit the King Fahd mosque after lunch but could not find it. Bin Don, on the other