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Habib's Pakistan visit 'for business'

Patrick Walters
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MAMDOUH Habib had travelled to Pakistan in 2001 to pursue a "lucrative deal" involving a cleaning business, his lawyer said yesterday.

Stephen Hopper again denied Mr Habib, freed last month from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, had spent time in terrorist training camps, as alleged by Australian officials.
"He was looking at doing this for a year or two and then, apparently, if this business was what it was made out to be, he would've set himself up," Mr Hopper told the ABC's Insiders program.

"There was a contact he was meeting ... and that opportunity would have taken him beyond Pakistan to another country."

Mr Hopper also denied claims his client owed Centrelink money for disability support payments. Attorney-General Philip Ruddock said he could not comment on Mr Habib's personal circumstances, but that the rules were clear.

"If people leave and have no entitlement to take a pension or other form of benefit when they are abroad and they have done so, then we seek to recover it," he said.

A Centrelink spokesman said last week the agency would investigate claims Mr Habib had continued to receive disability payments after he left Australia for Pakistan.

But Mr Hopper told The Australian Mr Habib had written to Centrelink three weeks before leaving and owed the Government no money.

Mr Hopper said Mr Habib had yet to decide whether to respond to evidence given last week by federal police chief Mick Keelty, who claimed Mr Habib had trained with Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba and offered his services to al-Qa'ida in 2001 "almost as a mercenary".