



WTC hijackers knew they had one-way ticket

By Andrew Buncombe

Striking video footage released on Monday apparently shows one of the September 11 hijackers standing in front of a picture of the burning World Trade Centre and saying it is time to "kill Americans in their heartland".

Elsewhere on the footage, Osama bin Laden and his most senior lieutenant Ayman Al-Zawahiri celebrate the "sacrifice" of the 19 men involved in the attacks.

"It is time to kill the Americans on their own ground among their families and soldiers . . . The truth is that we will fight them on their own ground," says the suspected hijacker on the tape broadcast by the Qatar-based television channel Al-Jazeera.

'The truth is that we will fight them on their own ground'

"The time of humiliation and enslavement is over and the time has come to kill the Americans on their own turf."

The channel said it believed the initial part of the tape was recorded in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar - a Taliban and al-Qaeda stronghold - at least six months before the attacks on New York and Washington.

The montage showing the twin towers after they had been struck by two hijacked airliners must have been electronically added at a later date, along with the words 'Get the infidels out of the Arabian peninsula'.

While Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network have released a number of videos since the attacks, the timing and context of this most recent recording is particularly interesting. The suspected hijacker is dressed in battle fatigues, has an Arab kaffiyeh scarf around his head and strikes a pose that some observers have likened to that adopted by Palestinian suicide bombers in recordings made before launching their attacks.

While the participants could not have foretold the current situation in the Middle East, the timing of the video's release suggests someone within al-Qaeda realises it could have a big impact among Arab communities enraged at Israel's current military operation. Al-Jazeera said it was passed the tape last week from a production company which supports al-Qaeda and that it would broadcast the full footage on Thursday.

The hijackers knew that they were on a suicide mission

There is some uncertainty about the identity of the suspected hijacker, who is seen making, what in effect, is a final will, as well as warning of sending America "a bloody message".

One report said an Al-Jazeera subtitle identifies the man as Ahmad al-Haznawi al-Ghamdi, a name which closely resembles that of Ahmed al-Ghamdi, who was on United

Airlines Flight 175 that was flown into the WTC's south tower.

Another report says the man is identified as - and bears a striking resemblance to - Ahmed Al Haznawi, who was aboard United Airlines Flight 93 which crashed in rural Pennsylvania after the passengers overpowered the hijackers.

There is no doubt as to the identity of the men shown in the other portion of the clip: Bin Laden is shown kneeling alongside his deputy, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who praises the hijackers.

"This great victory that was achieved is only thanks to God," says Al-Zawahiri. "It is not because of our skill or tricks or excellence. It's all because of God. God looks into his servants' hearts and picks those worthy of his fairness and kindness. Our 19 brothers gave their lives for God. God chose them for this great victory that we're living now."

Al-Jazeera said the footage showed for the first time that the hijackers knew that they were on a suicide mission. A previous tape revealed Bin Laden apparently bragging that some of the 19 men had not been told the hijacked planes were to be crashed.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the Pentagon had also obtained what appeared to be an old videotape with Bin Laden on it, but that it was not clear whether it was the same tape aired by Al-Jazeera.

He said he still did not know whether Bin Laden, blamed by the United States for the suicide airliner attacks on New York and Washington, was alive or dead.

Rumsfeld said in response to questions at a news conference that he had watched parts of a Bin Laden tape on Sunday, but refused to say how the United States had obtained it.

"I have not seen Al-Jazeera's tape," he told reporters. "I have seen a tape and whether it's the same one, I'm not sure."

The impression of Arabic speakers who listened, the secretary said, was that the tape was to "reinforce" Bin Laden's ties to September 11.

"I was advised that what I was watching very likely was using a patchwork of clips from previous periods along with some dialogue of more recent periods - rather commentary from more recent periods," he added. - Independent Foreign Service and Reuters

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