



Chilling, defiant: the video suicide message of a September 11 killer

Arab TV network broadcasts first taped testimony by a hijacker

Julian Borger in Washington
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For the first time, one of the 19 suicide hijackers involved in the September 11 attacks has been shown explaining his motives, with the broadcast yesterday by an Arab television network of a videotape made last year by a man identified as a Saudi conspirator.

The Qatar-based al-Jazeera station named the man as Ahmed al-Haznawi - a hijacker on United Airlines flight 93 which crashed in Pennsylvania on September 11. He is shown angrily reciting a prepared statement, which al-Jazeera described as a last will and testament.

Appearing in a camouflage jacket topped by a black and white Arab scarf or kefiyeh, and gesticulating with his hands, the 22-year-old Saudi pledges to give his life to "martyrdom" and swears to send a "bloodied message" to Americans by attacking them in their "heartland".

In a caption, the broadcast named the man as al-Ghamdi, but al-Jazeera's editor-in-chief, Ibrahim Hilal, said he was al-Haznawi, a member of the al-Ghamdi clan. The man resembles the picture of al-Haznawi shown on the FBI's web site.

In the background there is a picture of the World Trade Centre twin towers exploding, which appears to have been added digitally after the tape was recorded. A caption proclaims: "Get the infidels out of the Arabian peninsula."

The al-Jazeera network said the tape was entitled "The wills of the New York and Washington Battle Martyrs" and showed pictures of all 19 hijackers. According to network officials, it was made in the Afghan city of Kandahar about six months before September 11, and was delivered to the television station last week together with tapes of Osama bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, as part of a documentary put together by a pro al-Qaida production company.

Al-Jazeera said it would broadcast the documentary in full on Thursday. Mr Hilal said it had been put together recently as it refers to the Arab summit in late March as an imminent event.

In his statement, al-Haznawi provides no details of the plot, but declares: "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."

He boasts of having killed Americans outside their homeland, an apparent reference to al-Qaida attacks on US targets overseas. "The time of humiliation and subjugation is over. It's time to kill Americans in their heartland," he adds. "Lord I regard myself as a martyr for you to accept me as such."

In January, the US justice department showed videos it said had been found in Afghanistan in which three Arab men pledged their lives to martyrdom for the al-Qaida cause. None of the men have been found. Yesterday was the first time recorded testimony by one of the September 11 hijackers had been broadcast.

Al-Haznawi is reported to have left his home in the al-Baha region of Saudi Arabia in 2000 telling friends he was going to train in an al-Qaida camp in Afghanistan and then to fight in Chechnya.

The previous year, he had asked his father for permission to take part in the "jihad" in Chechnya but his father

refused. Al-Haznawi eventually left without his family's permission, and returned home later in the same year, when he attempted to recruit other members of his clan. He obtained a visa in December 2000 allowing him into the US for flying lessons.

He also persuaded two distant cousins, Ahmed and Hamza al-Ghamdi, to take part in the September 11 attack. They were on a United Airlines flight which crashed into the World Trade Centre.

Al-Jazeera, owned by Qatar's government, has emerged as the Arab world's leading source of news, reaching 35 million Arabic speakers. Since the September 11 attacks it has been used as al-Qaida's principal outlet for broadcasting the organisation's defiance of US retaliation, to the fury of the Bush administration which has accused it of serving as a terrorist mouthpiece.

At one point the US called on Qatar to prevent al-Jazeera broadcasting Osama bin Laden's videotaped statements in full.

The al-Qaida tapes broadcast by the network have gradually moved towards acknowledging the organisation's role in the September 11 conspiracy.

In previous tapes, Bin Laden lauded the plot but stopped short of claiming direct responsibility. A declaration by Al-Zawahiri in yesterday's excerpt, together with Al-Haznawi's statement, comes close to a full admission, and the full documentary is expected to go even further.

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