

Will Gives a Window Into Suspect's Mind

Czechs Say Atta Met With Iraqi Official

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Court documents released yesterday describe the last will and testament of suspected terrorist ringleader Mohamed Atta -- a detailed set of instructions for his funeral that scholars of Islam said may offer crucial evidence about the puritanical ideology that motivated him.

The documents, unsealed in U.S. District Court in Portland, Maine, also reveal that a flight attendant aboard American Airlines Flight 11 -- the plane Atta is believed to have flown into the World Trade Center -- made a cellular phone call in which she said several Middle Eastern men had used knives to wound other passengers.

Meanwhile, sources in the Czech government said yesterday that Atta met an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague just before flying to the United States in June 2000. Media reports in Prague identified the Iraqi as Ahmed Khalil Ibrahim Samir Al-Ani, former consul and second secretary at the Iraqi Embassy in Prague. He was expelled from the Czech Republic last April for what its Foreign Ministry described as activities "incompatible with his diplomatic status," a euphemism for espionage.

Together, the handwritten will, the dramatic phone call and the meeting in Prague help fill in the still murky picture of why, how and, possibly, with whom Atta plotted the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The will shows that long before he boarded the Boeing 767 on Sept. 11, Atta had been thinking in great detail about his own death.

Dated April 11, 1996, when Atta was living as a student in Hamburg, Germany, the document declares his Muslim faith and his belief in life after death. It then sets out 18 instructions intended to guarantee that his burial would be conducted in accordance with his own strict reading of Islamic law.

"I don't want anyone to weep and cry or to rip their clothes or slap their face because this is an ignorant thing to do," wrote Atta, who referred to himself as Mohamed bin Mohamed El-Amir awad El-Sayed. He also decreed that no women should attend his funeral or visit his grave.

Scholars of Islamic law and religious customs said Atta's meticulous instructions provide a unique window into his personal attitudes and religious mind-set. They combine requests to observe fairly standard Sunni Muslim funeral practices with more puritanical demands apparently derived from Wahhabism, the strain of Islam that predominates in Saudi Arabia, the home country of Osama bin Laden, the scholars said.

"This is a Saudi Wahhabi connection," said Abdul-Aziz Sachedina, a Muslim cleric and professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia. "They are the ones who tell other Muslims not to show their emotions."

The document was found by the FBI in a suitcase that Atta had checked for the flight from Boston to Los Angeles but that was never loaded aboard the plane. The will's existence and contents, preliminarily translated from Arabic by the FBI, were publicly confirmed for the first time in an FBI affidavit unsealed Thursday in Maine and released yesterday in Washington by the Justice Department. The will was previously reported in this week's edition of the German magazine Der Spiegel.

In the same suitcase was a separate five-page letter that instructed the hijackers how to prepare for their last day of life -- including advice to bring along their wills. That letter was first reported in The Washington Post on Sept. 28.

Also found in the luggage, according to court documents, were a Koran and various materials that reflect Atta's pilot training, including a hand-held electronic flight computer used for navigation and a simulator procedures manual for Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft.

The FBI affidavit cites the flight attendant's cellular telephone conversation to support a request for a warrant to search a rental car left by the hijackers at Portland International Jetport. Investigators seized 31 items -- ranging from a Chips Ahoy cookie package to a toothpick -- in the blue 2001 Nissan Altima.

The cell phone call sheds light on how a few men armed only with small knives or box-cutters could quickly commandeer an airliner: They did not hesitate to draw blood.

In a conversation with an American Airlines employee at Boston's Logan International Airport, the flight attendant said "that several males of Middle Eastern descent seated in the area of rows 9 and 10 of AA11 were armed with knives and had wounded other passengers and were hijacking the plane," the affidavit says. It adds that Atta was assigned seat 8D and another suspected hijacker, Abdulaziz Alomari, was in 8G.

The U.S. investigation of the Sept. 11 attacks has focused on bin Laden, but some Western intelligence officials have said the possibility of Iraqi responsibility should get close scrutiny as well. Atta's meeting with the Iraqi official is one of the few pieces of evidence to surface publicly that points in that direction. Iraq has denied any involvement in the attacks.

A second suspected hijacker also visited Prague, according to Czech sources, but his identity or whom he might have met could not be determined yesterday. Czech officials were investigating whether Atta made another, earlier trip to Prague, officials said.

Atta obtained a U.S. visa in Berlin on May 18, 2000, but instead of traveling directly to the United States, he went to Bonn, where he got a visa for the Czech Republic. He then rented a car and drove to Prague,

spending a day there before flying to Newark, one source said.

Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kavan briefed Secretary of State Colin L. Powell on Atta's Iraqi connection when the two conferred this week in Washington, sources in the Czech capital said.

The Bush administration has said there is no intelligence linking Saddam Hussein's government to the Sept. 11 attacks. But a number of U.S. commentators, including former CIA director R. James Woolsey, have contended that the sophistication of the attacks indicates state sponsorship.

Islamic scholars pointed to several parts of Atta's will that reflect his personal puritanism. For example, he requested not only that no women visit his grave site -- a rule that is widely observed, albeit with varying degrees of rigor, in Muslim countries -- but also that "I don't want a pregnant woman or a person who is unclean to come and say goodbye to me because I don't approve of it."

Atta is reported to have shunned women during his sojourn in Western countries. His refusal to permit pregnant women to mourn him "is a personal thing -- it has no basis in Islam," said Mohammad Qureshi, who supervises funerals at the Islamic Center of Southern California in Los Angeles.

Atta also asked that the person assigned to wash his body, as required by Islamic law, take care to wear gloves "so he won't touch my genitals." This seems to be Atta's own gloss on Muslim practice, according to which those who wash the body may not look upon the genitals of the deceased and must keep them covered with a cloth, scholars said.

A basic difficulty in analyzing the will, however, is that Islam is a highly decentralized religion with no universally recognized doctrinal authority. Therefore, even experts disagree on how to categorize Atta's ideas.

In one puzzling passage, Atta seemed to be angrily perpetuating the conflicts of his life. "I don't want anyone to visit me who didn't get along with me while I was alive or to kiss me or say goodbye when I die," he wrote.

The will may also help investigators learn more about Atta's associates in Germany. It was signed by two Muslim witnesses. One of them, Mounir El Motassadeq, 27, is a Moroccan studying at Hamburg's Technical University. Police questioned him last weekend after discovering that he had transferred money to Atta and Ramzi Binalshibh, an alleged accomplice who is now the subject of an international arrest warrant.

Motassadeq also had power of attorney over the account of another suspected hijacker, Marwan Al-Shehhi, who was aboard United Flight 175, which crashed into the World Trade Center. Motassadeq denies ever seeing or signing the will.

Reached by phone, Motassadeq said he had nothing to do with the Sept. 11 attacks and knew the

hijackers through the university. He said he transferred \$1,000 to Atta last year to pay for a computer. But he cut off the interview before explaining why he transferred \$2,350 to Binalshibh, a citizen of Yemen who appears to have fled Germany.

Motassadeq has not been arrested and remains at his home in Hamburg. University officials described him as a "normal student."

Finn reported from Germany, Lane from Washington. Special correspondent Pamela Ferdinand in Boston contributed to this report.

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