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'Today, our nation saw evil'

Government probe focuses on bin Laden, intelligence intercept

By KAREN GULLO
And JOHN SOLOMON
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials began piecing together a case linking Osama bin Laden to the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, aided by an intercept of communications between his supporters and harrowing cell phone calls from victims aboard the jetliners before they crashed Tuesday.

Authorities were focusing some of their efforts on possible bin Laden supporters in Florida based on the identification of a suspected hijacker on one of the manifests of the four jets that crashed, law enforcement officials said.

The FBI was preparing to search locations in Broward County in south Florida and the Daytona Beach area in central Florida, Florida Department of Law Enforcement spokesman Rick Morera said.

The locations had links to the suspected bin Laden supporter on the jet manifest, officials said.

U.S. intelligence intercepted communications between bin Laden supporters discussing the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, according to Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"They have an intercept of some information that included people associated with bin Laden who acknowledged a couple of targets were hit," Hatch said in an interview with The Associated Press. He declined to be more specific.

Hatch also said law enforcement has data possibly linking one person on one of the four ill-fated flights to bin Laden's organization.

Government and industry officials said at least one flight attendant and two passengers called from three of the planes as they were being forced down in New York and Washington — each describing similar circumstances involving knife-wielding hijackers.

The callers indicated hijackers armed with knives, in some cases stabbing flight attendants, had taken control of the plane and were forcing them down toward the ground, officials said.

One of the passengers was Barbara Olson, the wife of Solicitor General Theodore Olson, who called her husband as the hijacking was occurring. She was aboard American Airlines Flight 77, which left Dulles International Airport in Washington and was forced to crash into the Pentagon.

The officials said Olson told her husband the attackers had used knifelike instruments to take over the plane and had forced passengers to the back of the jet.

Theodore Olson confirmed his wife made the calls before dying. "She called from the plane while it was being hijacked. I wish it wasn't so but it is," he said.

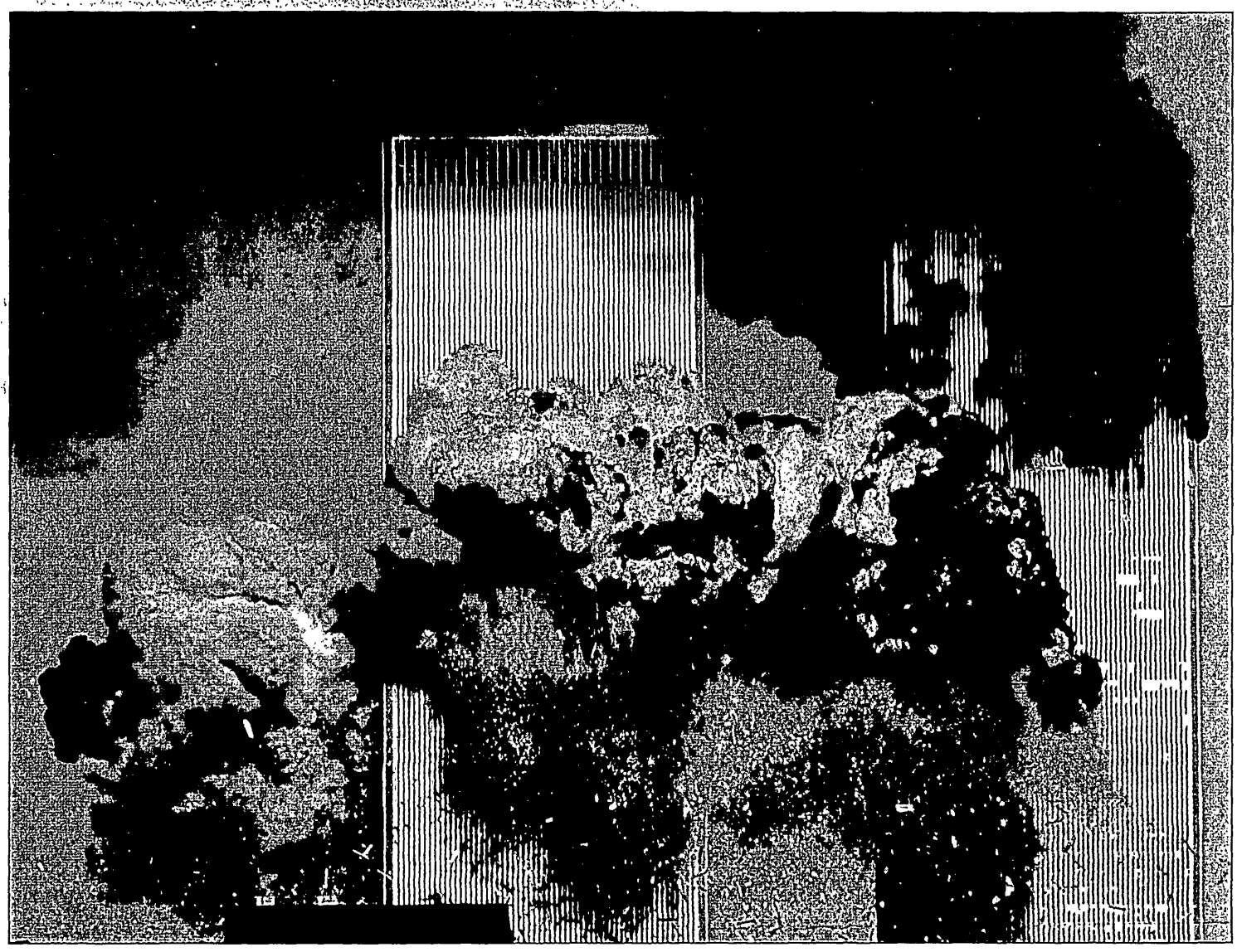
Separately, a businessman, his wife and young child aboard a United Airlines flight that left Boston and crashed into the World Trade Center twice called his father in Connecticut as his plane was being hijacked, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the victim's father told the FBI his son made two calls, and both times the phone cut off. In the first call, the businessman said a stewardess had been stabbed. In the second call, the son said his plane was going down.

The man was identified as former Easton, Conn., resident Peter Hanson. A minister confirmed the cell phone call to his father, Lee Hanson, an official in Easton, a small town near Bridgeport.

"He called to his parents' home, and so in that way they were so together in that moment," the Rev. Bonnie Bardot said.

And a flight attendant aboard the second jetliner that struck the World Trade Center managed to call an emergency number from the back of the airplane, an American Airlines source said. The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the flight attendant reported her fellow attendants had been stabbed, the cabin had been taken over, and they were going down in New York.



Spencer Platt / Getty Images
A fiery blast rocks the World Trade Center after it was hit by two planes Tuesday in New York City.

Gulnara Samoilova / Associated Press
People make their way amid dust and debris in New York on Tuesday after terrorists crashed two airliners into the World Trade Center, bringing down the twin 110-story towers.

A San Francisco woman told KTVU-TV that her son, Mark Bingham, 31, called her from aboard United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania. "We've been taken over. There are three men that say they have a bomb," Alice Hoglan quoted her son as saying.

Attorney General John Ashcroft confirmed the American Airlines Flight 11 that left Boston for Los Angeles "was hijacked by suspects armed with knives." He briefed about 250 members of Congress late Tuesday on the latest developments.

The stories of these cell phone callers matched those of a call apparently made aboard a plane that

See PROBE, Page A4

Bush vows deaths will be avenged

By SANDRA SOBIERAJ
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A grim-faced President Bush asked the nation to find comfort in Scripture as he mourned the deaths of thousands of Americans in Tuesday's atrocities and vowed to avenge their killings. "Today, our nation saw evil," he said.

In his first prime-time Oval Office address, Bush said the United States would find and punish "those behind these evil acts," and any country that harbors them.

Bush spoke from the Oval Office just hours after bouncing between Florida and air bases in Louisiana and Nebraska for security reasons. Fighter jets and decoy helicopters accompanied his evening flight to Washington and the White House, where his Marine One helicopter briefly stood vigil on the South Lawn in the event of another evacuation.

See BUSH, Page A4

INDEX

Ann Landers.....C7
Classifieds.....C1
Clubs.....E5
Community Briefs.....E5
Comm. Calendar.....E4
Engagements.....E3
Games.....C7
Movies.....B4
Obituaries.....E2
Opinions.....A7
Police Log.....E2
Sports.....B1
Television.....B5
Weather.....A2
Weddings.....E3
West.....E1
Your Life.....F1

AMERICA'S Day of terror

stories and photos inside

The story in pictures, See back

Reactions

❑ Attack on home soil shocks area residents.
❑ World watches in horror as terror unfolds in United States.
❑ Experts offer advice on how to help children cope with tragedy.
A3

On the scene

❑ New York begins massive rescue effort.
❑ News strikes close for eastern Idahoans.
❑ Pentagon attack came minutes after Secretary of Defense predicted "another event."
A4

Around the world

❑ Nation's armed forces on worldwide alert.
❑ Arab-Americans, Muslim groups decry attacks, worry about harassment.
❑ Tuesday's hijackings anything but typical, security experts say.
❑ Taliban denies bin Laden had involvement in attacks.
A5

Impact

❑ Terrorist attack shakes financial markets around the world.
❑ Travelers delayed in Idaho Falls airport, all others around country.
❑ Gas prices spike with fears of disruption in supply.
A6

Opinion

❑ Terrorist attack awakes a slumbering giant.
A7