

# Military searching for ways to end air patrols

WASHINGTON (AP) — The military is exploring ways to stop the around-the-clock anti-terrorism patrols that fighter jets have been flying over American cities since Sept. 11, defense officials said.

But four months after the devastating attacks on U.S. soil, any decision on ending the combat air patrols may come down to largely a political calculation of how safe Americans would feel without them, they said.

As a part of heightened homeland defense, the missions began after terrorist hijackers crashed jetliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. They have flown constantly over New York and Washington since then.

Other patrols are flown randomly over other major metropolitan areas and key infrastructure, and jets are on alert at 30 bases across the country to scramble if called.

The military also has been authorized to order pilots to shoot down commercial aircraft if necessary.

Officials have been looking to cut back on the program for some time, knowing from the outset that the high-tempo use of manpower, equipment and money couldn't be kept up for long with the existing people and budget, one defense official said on condition of anonymity.

## Final decision may depend on the safety Americans feel with the patrols

Now that four months have passed and aviation security has been improved somewhat, some wonder it if might be time to start rethinking the patrols, the official said.

The operation uses 11,000 people and 250 aircraft, another official said, also in return for anonymity. Those figures include maintenance crews, pilots for 100 F-15 and F-16 fighter jets, as well as crews for tankers needed for midair refueling and AWACS — Airborne Warning and Control System — planes to provide radar information.

At the Pentagon, Rear Adm. John Stufflebeem said Monday that pilots and crews of airborne warning aircraft may be operating so intensely that they are not getting their usual training for other missions.

"Maybe we're not getting the training that we need done now for our rotations overseas, so that's being looked at," he said. Stufflebeem is deputy director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The fighter pilots, mostly from Air National

Guard units, go up for flights of two to six hours. The jets are refueled about every two hours, meaning some go through two midair refuelings on a single sortie.

From Sept. 11 to Dec. 10, the operation flew 13,000 missions. The cost was \$324 million, Defense Department spokeswoman Susan Hansen said.

Air Force officials had no immediate comment Sunday.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command, which runs the operation, said periodic review of missions is standard procedure in the military.

"We continuously analyze our ongoing operations ... as a matter of prudent military planning," said Maj. Barry Venable, a spokesman for NORAD in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"We will continue to execute our role (in homeland defense) until the national leadership directs otherwise," he said.

NORAD says that through Dec. 10, its jets

responded 207 times to problems such as unidentified aircraft, planes violating restricted air space and in-flight emergencies.

Not included in the figure is the case in which two jets escorted a Paris-to-Miami flight to Boston late last month after a passenger tried to ignite what authorities said was an explosive hidden in his shoes.

In 92 of the cases, jets on alert on the ground were scrambled to respond.

In the other 115 cases, NORAD diverted jets that already were in the air flying combat patrols.

Pentagon officials said privately that there is mounting stress on the people and planes that can affect readiness for other missions.

And while they believe the patrols are a deterrent to would-be attackers and give some Americans a greater sense of security, they also argue that scrambling planes against attacks is a measure of last resort. Security should be tightened on the ground before problems become airborne in the first place, they maintain.

One alternative to constant patrols would be to keep planes on ground alert, as was done before Sept. 11. They were on alert at a handful of places before it was ordered at 26 bases, then grew to the current 30.

## Photos released of al-Qaida suspects

WASHINGTON (AP) — A chilling videotape of an alleged member of al-Qaida, cradling a rifle, eyes closed, is among videos and photos of five suspects delivering what authorities call "martyrdom messages from suicide terrorists."

Attorney General John Ashcroft released the videos and photos Thursday, urging the public to help "identify, locate and incapacitate terrorists who are suspected of planning additional attacks against innocent civilians."

One of those depicted was an associate of hijacking ringleader Mohammed Atta. Authorities believe the man intended to take part in the Sept. 11 attacks.

Ashcroft said the videotapes

had been recovered recently from the rubble of the home of Mohammad Atef, believed to have been Osama bin Laden's military chief. Officials say Atef was killed by a U.S. airstrike in November.

The sound was left out of the released versions to guard against the possibility that the messages contained signals for other terrorists, officials said.

In one video a man buries his head in his arms for moment. The next image is of the same man, eyes closed, hugging a rifle. He leans his face close to the barrel, his lips appearing to touch it. He then looks up and smiles.

The strap of the rifle is inscribed with Arabic writing that the man seems to be showing off. Officials did not transcribe the message.

The videos were shown without sound. Ashcroft said preliminary translations of statements from the men indicated they may have been trained and prepared for attacks.

"The videotapes depict young men delivering what appear to be martyrdom messages from suicide terrorists," said Ashcroft.

Authorities don't know where the men are; there is no evidence they ever entered the United States.

"These men could be anywhere in the world," Ashcroft said, urging viewers to call the FBI or an American consulate if they think they've seen any of the five men.

He said the government had tentatively identified four of the five men depicted in the video as: Abd Al-Rahim, Muhammad Sa'id Ali Hasan, Khalid Ibn Muhammad Al-Juhani and Ramzi Binalshibh. The fifth man's identity is not known.

Ashcroft said little was known of the five except Binalshibh, a Yemeni whom officials allege was an associate of the Sept. 11 suicide hijacker Atta.

In the indictment handed down in December against Zacarias Moussaoui, Binalshibh was named along with Atta and the 18 other hijackers as an unindicted conspirator.

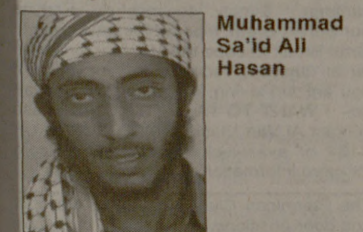
At a news conference, Ashcroft showed 30-second videos of Hasan, Al-Rahim and Al-Juhani. There were technical problems with the videos of the other two men; for them, the government released only still photos taken from the tapes. Photos shot from the tapes were also released for the other three.

Ashcroft said investigators were still translating the sound or a translation would be made after weighing security concerns, he said, adding that the department may decide not to release the sound.

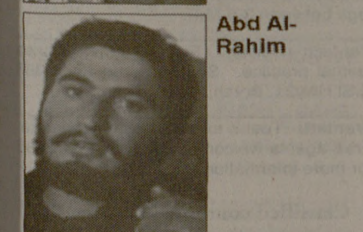
"The portions we released today we felt were safe for release and we didn't believe they contained any surreptitious messages or coded signals that would be designed to alert parts of the terrorist network," Ashcroft said.

## FBI releases images

The Justice Department released photos and video excerpts of five al-Qaida suspects on Thursday, and asked people worldwide to help locate them. The tapes, found by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, depict the suspects simulating attacks and sending what officials describe as "martyrdom messages."



Muhammad Sa'id Ali Hasan



Abd Al-Rahim



Khalid Ibn Muhammad Al-Juhani



Unknown person



Ramzi Binalshibh is believed to have been the intended 20th hijacker of the Sept. 11 attack on the United States. Authorities believe that after Binalshibh was denied entry to the United States, Zacarias Moussaoui, indicted by U.S. authorities on Dec. 11, was chosen as an alternate.

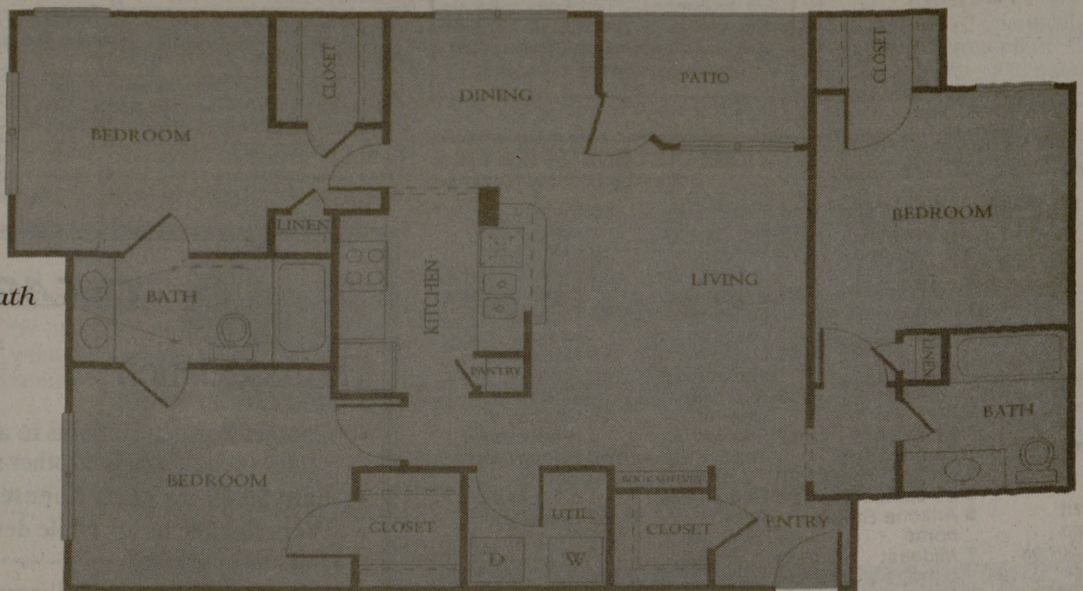
SOURCE: FBI

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