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Web site shows suspected American hostage beheading

By SARAH EL DEEB
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO, Egypt — A video posted Monday on a Web site showed the beheading of a man identified as American hostage Eugene Armstrong.

The militant group led by Jordanian terror mastermind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi claimed responsibility for the slaying and said another hostage — either another American or a Briton held by the group — will be killed in 24 hours unless all Muslim women prisoners are released from U.S. military jails.

"You, sister, rejoice. God's soldiers are coming to get you out of your chains and restore your purity by returning you to your mother and father," said a militant reading a statement in the video.

In Washington, a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Armstrong's body had been recovered, but the official would provide no information about where or when it had been recovered.

The taped beheading appears to be of Armstrong, but the CIA is still reviewing the tape to be sure, the official said.

The 9-minute tape was posted on a Web site used by Islamic militants after a 48-hour deadline set earlier by the group for the beheading of the three employees of a construction company abducted Thursday in Baghdad — Armstrong, American Jack Hensley and Briton Kenneth Bigley.

The tape showed a man seated on the floor, blindfolded and wearing an orange jumpsuit with his hands bound behind his back.

Five militants dressed in black stood behind the man, four of them armed with assault rifles, with a black Tawhid and Jihad banner on the wall behind them. The militant in the center read out a statement, as the hostage rocked back and forth and side to side where he sat.

After finishing the statement, the militant pulled a knife, rushed to the hostage from behind and cut his throat until the head was severed.

The victim gasped loudly as blood poured from his neck. His killer held up the head at one point, and placed the head on top of the body.

"The fate of the first infidel was cutting off the head before your eyes and ears. You have a 24-hour opportunity. Abide by our demand in full and release all the Muslim women, otherwise the head of the other will follow this one," the speaker said.

He appeared to indicate the hostages would be killed one at a time and did not specify whether Hensley or Bigley would be next.

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Masked men stand behind a man identified as American construction co tractor **Eugene Armstrong**, moments before he was beheaded in Iraq in this image from video made available on an Islamic Web site, Mond

The voice of the militant sounded like past recordings attributed to al-Zarqawi, whose Tawhid and Jihad group claimed responsibility for kidnapping Armstrong along with another American and a Briton.

The militants had demanded the release of female Iraqi prisoners detained by the U.S. military. The military says it is holding two women as security detainees in Iraq, including Dr. Rihab Rashid Taha, a scientist who became known as "Germ" for helping Iraq m weapons out of anthrax.

The militant on the vi called President Bush "a d and addressed him, sayi "Now, you have people w love death just like you l life. Killing for the sake God is their best wish, gett to your soldiers and allies a their happiest moments, a cutting the heads of the cri nal infidels is implement the orders of our lord."

Afghan vice president Karzai escapes roadside bombing

By Stephen Graham
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan — A deputy to U.S.-backed President Hamid Karzai escaped a roadside bombing in northern Afghanistan on Monday, just four days after Karzai himself was targeted as he tried to hit the campaign trail for landmark Oct. 9 elections.

Meanwhile, two U.S. soldiers and several militants were killed in fire fights in the volatile southeast Monday, further underlining fragile security ahead of the vote.

Nayiamatullah Shahrani, one of four Afghan vice presidents, and Urban Development Minister Gul Agha Sherzai were on their way to inspect a road project in northern Kunduz province when the explosion rocked their convoy, police said.

The remote-controlled bomb, hidden at a roadside in Khanabad district, damaged a car in the 20-vehicle convoy that was carrying Shahrani's bodyguards, slightly hurting one of them with flying glass, Police Chief Mutaleb Beg said.

Beg blamed "enemies" for the attack, but didn't elaborate. No one was immediately arrested. The incident was confirmed by an aide to Karzai — who was in New York for this week's United Nations annual session of the General Assembly.

On Thursday, Karzai aborted his first major campaign event when suspected Taliban fired a rocket at the U.S. military helicopter carrying him to a school opening in southeastern Afghanistan.

No one was hurt in that attack, but it underscored the threat against Karzai and his U.S.-backed government in the face of a stubborn Taliban-led insurgency.

More than 900 people, including 12 elec tion workers, have died in political violen across Afghanistan so far this year, and o ficials are braced for more bloodshed in th run-up to the balloting — Afghanistan's fir direct presidential vote, supposed to cap th three-year international drive to stabilize th war-torn country.

Most of the violence has come in the sou and east, where the U.S. military report four separate skirmishes Monday.

The two U.S. soldiers were killed in a fi fight with insurgents in Paktika, a lawl province where al-Qaida fighters as well Taliban rebels are believed to operate.

Two other Americans were sligh wounded and six Afghan government troo were evacuated to a U.S. base for treatme a military statement said.

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