

IN JULY 2001, KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED TRIED TO COME TO THE US

✖ One of the most intriguing details of the Khalid Sheikh Mohammed indictment is this entry:

126. On or about July 23, 2001, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED applied for a U.S.-entry visa, using the name "Abdulrahman A.A. Al-Ghamdi," which application was denied.

That's interesting for a number of reasons. Such a reference doesn't show up in the 9/11 Report, though by that time, a CIA source had already warned that someone named "Khaled" was sending people to the US to carry out terrorist activities for Osama bin Laden; on July 12, 2001, that source IDed a picture of KSM.

It also raises questions about sourcing. Why didn't the 9/11 Commission know this by spring 2004, when they were finishing their report? Is it possible KSM told us about this attempt to fly to the US after that point? It's worth noting that at least one piece of intelligence that appears in the indictment—a description of how the muscle hijackers were taught to use short blades by killing sheep and camel—is sourced to the February 23, 2004 interrogation of KSM. Or has the government developed a granular enough understanding of KSM's movements that it was able to pin this attempted visa application to him via other—perhaps SIGINT—means?

But then the big question is, what was KSM planning to do if he had actually received a visa to travel to the US?

Given the timing and the context—KSM attempted

to get the visa just a week after Ramzi bin al-Shibh and Mohammed Atta met in Spain for their last planning meeting before the attack, and therefore presumably right after bin al-Shibh reported back to KSM on what happened at the meeting—it seems that KSM was worried about whether Ziad Jarrah would carry through with the attack. The 9/11 Report describes:

The most significant part of the mid-July conversation [between KSM and bin al-Shibh] concerned Jarrah's troubled relationship with Atta. KSM and Binalshibh both acknowledge that Jarrah chafed under Atta's authority over him. Binalshibh believes the disagreement arose in part from Jarrah's family visits. Moreover, Jarrah had been on his own for most of his time in the United States because Binalshibh's visa difficulty had prevented the two from training together. Jarrah thus felt excluded from the decisionmaking. Binalshibh had to act as a broker between Jarrah and Atta.

Concerned that Jarrah might withdraw from the operation at this late stage, KSM emphasized the importance of Atta and Jarrah's resolving their differences. Binalshibh claims that such concern was unwarranted, and in their mid-July discussion reassured KSM that Atta and Jarrah would reconcile and be ready to move forward in about a month, after Jarrah visited his family. Noting his concern and the potential for delay, KSM at one point instructed Binalshibh to send "the skirts" to "Sally"—a coded instruction to Binalshibh to send funds to Zacarias Moussaoui.

On July 20, Jarrah's girlfriend bought him a one-way ticket to Dusseldorf. On July 23, KSM attempted to get his visa to the US. On July 25, Jarrah flew to Dusseldorf; while bin al-Shibh talked to him right away, they did not have

their more substantive conversation until later. And between July 30 and August 3, 2001, Mustafa al-Hawsawi and bin al-Shibh sent money to Moussaoui he used to enroll in flight school (and buy a Leatherman knife).

It's also worth noting that Atta, Hani Hanjour, and Nawaf al-Hazmi met in Las Vegas on August 13. The 9/11 Report reported it had gotten no explanation as to why they chose Las Vegas. The indictment explains that "in summer 2001, KHALID SHEIKH MOHAMMED instructed some of the hijackers to meet in Las Vegas to make final preparations."

Had KSM received his visa, would he have attended the meeting?

In any case, it appears that KSM's concerns about the plot falling to pieces (or at least losing Jarrah as a pilot) were sufficiently serious that he tried to come to the US himself to deal with the problem.