



## **Attorney General Transcript**

### **News Conference Regarding Richard Reid Wednesday, January 16, 2002 DOJ Conference Center**

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: Good afternoon. In the four months since al Qaeda terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and commandeered a plane, which obviously ultimately crashed in Pennsylvania, we've called on the public three times to be alert to the possibility of imminent terrorist attacks. First, on October the 11th, then again on October the 29th, and for the third time on December the 3rd, we issued security alerts warning of possible additional terrorist attacks on the United States or on U.S. interests overseas.

By using these alerts, we've asked Americans to balance a difficult new set of realities. We have asked citizens to assume a new responsibility: to go about their lives with a new sense of awareness, alertness; vigilant to the danger of terrorism. We've asked law enforcement to carry new responsibilities and to assume new responsibilities. We've trusted people to act responsibly in the face of terrorist threats, to use good common sense to protect not just themselves, but those around them.

And on December the 22nd, on a Paris to Miami, Florida flight, thousands of feet above the Atlantic Ocean, our trust in the common sense of people who act in the face of terrorism was vindicated.

Press reports have recounted in vivid detail the events that transpired on American Airlines Flight 63. Passengers and flight crew in those accounts have been reported as describing how Richard Colvin Reid attacked a flight attendant when Reid was confronted attempting to

ignite what others described as a wire protruding from his shoe.

Passengers describe seeing a commotion, according to the reports, hearing cries for help from the flight attendants, and rushing to be of assistance.

The press reported that one French man reached over the seat to restrain Reid's arms as he struggled. Other passengers restrained his legs, according to accounts. Passengers were eventually able to remove Reid's shoe and restrain him using belts and whatever was available. One man on board, a doctor, sedated Reid. Another passenger held a fire extinguisher as a weapon while Reid was being restrained.

On Flight 63, for a very few minutes, at least, every passenger was vigilant and alert, every passenger an air marshal. And as a result, the 197 people on board that flight made it to the ground safely that day.

This morning a federal grand jury in Massachusetts returned a nine-count indictment against Richard Colvin Reid. Reid is charged as an al Qaeda-trained terrorist who attempted to destroy American Airlines Flight 63 with explosive devices concealed in his shoes.

I want personally to thank U.S. attorney Mike Sullivan

--

MR. : Thank you, General. Thank you, General.

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: Thank you to you and your staff.

MR. : Thank you, General. Thank you, sir.

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: -- who is here today with those who help him there. I want to thank him for his outstanding work on this case.

After hearing evidence that Reid received training from al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the grand jury has charged

him with the following crimes:

One count of the attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.

One count of attempted homicide of U.S. nationals overseas.

One count of placing an explosive device on an aircraft.

One count of attempted murder of passengers on an aircraft.

Two counts of interfering with a flight crew.

One count of willfully attempting to set fire to and destroy an aircraft.

One count of using a destructive device during a crime of violence.

And finally, the indictment charges Reid with one count of an new anti-terrorism offense created with the passage of the USA Patriot Act: attempted wrecking of a mass transportation vehicle.

As was the case with the charges filed against John Walker Lindh yesterday, our ability to prosecute terrorists has been greatly enhanced by the USA Patriot Act. And I want to take this opportunity once again to thank the Congress for providing us with the necessary tools that we need to protect the safety and security of American citizens.

Today's indictment contains serious charges against Richard Reid. If convicted of these crimes, Reid faces up to five life sentences. Reid's indictment alerts us to a clear, unmistakable threat that al Qaeda could attack the United States again. The lessons for Americans are undeniable: We must be prepared, we must be alert, we must be vigilant. Al Qaeda-trained terrorists may act on their

own or as part of the terrorist network, but we must assume that they will act. But for the vigilance of the flight crew and the courage of the passengers on Flight 63, Richard Reid may have succeeded in what today's indictment charges was his ultimate goal -- the destruction of Flight 63 and the 197 people on board.

That this tragedy was averted stands as proof that terrorists, even al Qaeda-trained terrorists, are no match for alert and vigilant people roused to defend themselves and to defend their freedom.

I'm pleased now to introduce the deputy attorney general of the United States, Larry Thompson, for remarks he would make in this respect.

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, General Ashcroft.

The horrific acts of September 11th were intended to destroy our country's spirit and the freedom our nation stands for. But in the months that have passed, we have seen our nation come together and grow stronger to preserve the freedoms we cherish. Not only have we come together as a nation, but we have received invaluable support from our international friends who have joined us in our war on terrorism.

We have urged Americans to be vigilant, and they have heeded our call. Today's indictment of Richard Reid shows what happens when people of courage join together to stop evil in its tracks. The individuals aboard American Airlines Flight 63 heeded the call to be aware, to be vigilant, and, as a result, prevented an act of terror. It is our belief, as the attorney general said, that the lives of all 183 passengers and 14 flight crew were saved because of the heroic efforts of certain individuals of the flight crew and passengers who assisted in subduing and restraining Reid.

We thank the American people, as well as our international friends, for being prepared, for being responsible and for taking action. Preventing and

disrupting terrorist acts must remain our highest priority.

Now I would like to call upon the director of the FBI for further remarks.

Bob?

MR. MUELLER: Thanks, Larry.

Thank you, Mr. Attorney General. Thank you, Larry, and good afternoon, everyone.

As is so often the case, help from the public is a critical component in the fight against terrorism and the fight against crime. And again, we have seen the courage and quick-thinking actions of passengers and crew. And in this case, again, those actions of the passengers and crew were a decisive factor in the outcome.

Now these courageous actions undoubtedly are borne out of a high state of awareness -- passengers and crew alert to the situation that easily could have proven to be disastrous. Repeatedly, we have asked for both increased public awareness and, in some cases, have appealed directly for assistance. Both of those appeals have brought results. An observant and responsible public is as much a partner to effective law enforcement as any other activity we in law enforcement undertake.

I want to thank all who contributed to this indictment. And I especially want to thank our many foreign colleagues who so ably have assisted us in investigating terrorism around the globe and in investigating this case, in particular. Thank you.

Mr. Attorney General?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: We'd be pleased to respond to questions at this time.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Is there any indication that he was actually acting on the orders of al Qaeda, or was he acting alone?

MR. MUELLER: The indictment, which was rendered this morning, as a result of the grand jury's action, contains the entirety of the facts that we would like to discuss at this time. And so we would stay within the indictment, in terms of those comments.

Yes.

Q Yesterday you announced the criminal complaint against John Walker Lindh. Today we have this indictment. Can you speak to the pace of the investigation, of the events of 9/11 in the context of these two events yesterday and today?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: Well, these cases happen to mature in terms of investigation and our capacity indict. And when a case matures and we are ready to indict, it is our desire to indict.

The fact that they have occurred on sequential days just indicates that events developed in the one case, which will be handled in the Eastern District of Virginia, in a time frame quite similar to the time frame of those who are working together with U.S. Attorney Mike Sullivan in the U. S. Federal District in Massachusetts.

Q If I could just follow up. Has evidence gathered in Afghanistan been a factor in both these cases?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: I believe it's important for me to say that rather than comment on evidence, to indicate that the indictments themselves and the charges detail the evidence to the level at which we would want to comment on it at this time.

Yes, sir?

Q This case brought aviation security back into focus. And we hear a great deal from lawmakers about the adequacy

of aviation security. I'd be interested in hearing what federal law enforcement's view is of the current status of aviation security, from either you and Mr. Mueller.

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: Well, let me just say that I believe our aviation security is improving. And later this week, the Transportation Department will be announcing its compliance and its effort to proceed with the special improved security circumstances mandated by the Congress. Obviously, we want to make flying as secure an enterprise as we can make it, and I believe we're on the path to do so.

MR. MUELLER: I think since September 11th there have been substantial improvements, and we continuously -- and by "we" I mean Governor Ridge's office, the FBI, other law enforcement entities are all seeking ways to improve the security on our airlines. And as I say, it's been substantially improved since September 11th.

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: Maybe if I could just add a personal note. In flying on commercial air transportation last week, I was made to feel very secure, at least the other passengers should have felt secure because I was given quite an examination. (Laughter.)

Q For Director Mueller. Analysts at the FBI have now had about three weeks to take a look at these shoes. I'm wondering if either of you could describe what their destructive potential was?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: As I've commented before, I think for us to make comments on the evidence at this time would be inappropriate. The indictment indicates a substantial number of facts about this case that we will allege, and further development of those facts would await the trial.

Yeah?

Q Attorney General, pardon me for stepping off subject for a minute, but Senator Leahy is asking for a firewall between Arthur Andersen's review of the FBI and its

reorganization, and the fact that the Justice Department investigation of the Enron matter must necessarily involve looking at Arthur Andersen.

Can you comment on how you will keep those matter separate, or perhaps Mr. Thompson or Mr. Mueller could do that, since --

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: Let me just say this, that I've recused myself from matter relating to Enron. I have made a statement to that effect. It's been made available to you. And that I will not make further comments about that case because I think it would be inappropriate for me to be involved. So that I'm not able to answer further in that respect.

Yes, sir.

Q Do you believe that Mr. Reid had any accomplices? And if so, do you have any in custody?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: I think the facts of the case that'll be the primary facts argued at trial are included in the indictment. For us to go beyond them at this time would be inappropriate.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Did you consider using a military tribunal in prosecuting -- (inaudible.)

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: You know, the facts as developed in this case were a result of this alert vigilance and participation of the American public. They are very clear. And, you know, there was a time when people thought maybe humor -- it was funny that we asked for people to be alert. And certainly if we'd have put out an alert saying, "Watch out for people with exploding shoes," we would have been laughed out of town. But I think people were alert, and that created a factual basis for the kind of court case that we've alleged.



I did confer with the Department of Justice -- pardon me, with the Department of Defense and with their general counsel, and they had no objection to our proceeding in this matter.

Yes.

Q The Wall Street Journal today, quoting -- basing its reporting on computer files seize in Afghanistan that perhaps hadn't gotten to U.S. authorities, said that Reid may have been on a scouting mission. Can you comment on that and whether there could be a superseding indictment in the future?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: First of all, I would comment on the Wall Street Journal's efforts. They and other new agencies have turned up information and have, in most cases, particularly in the Wall Street Journal and others, have acted responsibly to provide that information to the Department of Justice or to investigative agencies. And we think that's important information. And to the extent that such information would provide the basis for additional charges or enhancement in terms of these charges in some way that would change the potentials of the case, we would continue the investigation and do continue the investigation with the potential of superseded this indictment.

Also, let me just say that I kind of got going around the bush there. The answer to -- yes, it is possible that this indictment would be superseded. It is possible that it could happen based upon any additional evidence. We do not cease to collect evidence in these cases merely because charges have been brought or an indictment has been made. And the cooperation of institutions like the Wall Street Journal in the defense of the American people and securing the liberty and freedom of the people is much appreciated and is to be commended.

Yeah.

Q Could Mr. Thompson address the question earlier

about Enron as to whether or not there is a potential conflict from the Arthur Andersen contracts at the same time as they are being investigated?

ATTY GEN. ASHCROFT: I think he could. And I think that means that I have answered my last question. And if it's time for him to do that and the topic to shift, I'll see you all the next time when we have a chance to be together.

Thank you very much.

Q Thank you.

(Pause.)

Q (Off mike.)

MR. THOMPSON: Yes.

Q (Off mike) -- when you chase your boss out!  
(Laughter.)

MR. THOMPSON: With respect to the FBI review, the part, the component of Arthur Andersen that was selected -- and I might add, the -- that component was selected through an open procurement process -- that component is the management consulting practice of the Arthur Andersen company. And as I understand it, it's completely different and separate from the firm's accounting practice. I haven't --

Q Does that mean it's Accenture rather than --

MR. THOMPSON: No, it's a management consulting component of the Arthur Andersen company. As I understand, Accenture was a part of their subsidiary that was separated from them.

I haven't seen Senator Leahy's letters, so I can't comment any further on it.

Yes.

Q Mr. Thompson, there was another letter sent from Congress saying that you should recuse yourself from the case. Is that something that you are considering, because of King & Spalding?

MR. THOMPSON: I haven't seen that letter or any letter like that, either.

I understand that King & Spaulding (sp) did do some work for Enron, transaction work. I never have represented that company. With respect to my involvement in the case, we have consulted with Department of Justice ethics officials, and I have heard nothing that would cause me to not discharge my responsibilities as the deputy attorney general.

STAFF: Last question.

Q Congressman Waxman has also written to find out what the department --

MR. THOMPSON: I haven't seen that letter, either. (Laughter.)

Q -- last week to ensure the impartiality of the investigation itself. What steps is the department taking to make sure there's -- it's free of any kind of political influence?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, the attorney general has recused himself.

We will review any kinds of concerns that come to our attention with the very good and able ethics officials at the department. And rest assured that we will handle this investigation like all other investigations; that is, to make certain that we do everything possible to avoid any kind of appearance of impropriety or inappropriateness.

I might add that the leadership in the department who are responsible for the investigation, principally myself

and Assistant Attorney General Chertoff, we have been U.S. attorneys before, I think we both have a record of public service that is unquestioned, and we will continue to try to perform our duties as we have in the past.

Q Okay, thank you.

END.