

Two al-Zawahiri audiotapes, on State of the Union Speech and on French headscarf ban

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[Please note: Images may have been removed from this document. Page numbers have been added.]

On Tuesday 24 February 2004, the Arabic TV stations al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya aired one audiotape each (a few hours apart), both of which were said to have been recorded by Ayman al-Zawahiri. Some commentators believed the two TV stations had aired separate sections of one and the same tape, but the stations said there were two different recordings. Both said they had received the tapes earlier on Tuesday, but did not specify how they had obtained them. They said they had only broadcast newsworthy extracts of longer statements, without indicating the exact total length of the statements. The CIA later said they believed both tapes to be authentic.

The al-Jazeera tape criticized and threatened US President George Bush and ridiculed the President's assertion that two-thirds of al-Qaida had been eliminated. The al-Arabiya tape strongly criticized the French plan to ban religious symbols (including Muslims headscarves) in schools.

The recordings seemed to have been made recently, because one of the statements referred to the State of the Union speech delivered by George W. Bush on 20 January 2004, while the other referred to the passing of the French law on religious symbols on 10 February 2004. It has not been possible to find a complete transcript of the tapes. The following is a list of the quotations available in Western media reports.

Quotes from the al-Jazeera tape:

[The excerpt included attacks against the President's] "claims that his forces are spreading freedom and security in the world," that "Iraq has obtained freedom thanks to his Coalition forces," that "his government has arrested more than two-thirds of al-Qa'ida," and that "the situation in Afghanistan is stable."

"We remind Bush that the situation is not stable in Afghanistan, or else how do we wage, with God's support and might, our attacks on your troops and agents?"

"We remind Bush that he did not crush two-thirds of Al Qaeda. On the contrary, thanks be to God, Al Qaeda remains on the battleground of the holy war, raising the banner of Islam in the face of the Zionist-Crusader campaign against the Islamic community."

"Bush, fortify your targets, tighten your defense, intensify your security measures, because the fighting Islamic community — which sent you New York and Washington battalions — has decided to send you one battalion after the other, carrying death and seeking heaven."

"Bush appoints corrupt leaders and protects them, a glance at the Islamic world from Morocco to Indonesia will reveal those U.S.-backed leaders."

Quotes from the al-Arabiya tape:

"France, the country of liberty, defends only the liberty of nudity, debauchery and decay, while fighting chastity and modesty."

“The latest decision by the French president to create a law preventing Muslim girls from covering their heads in schools is [...] consistent with the burning of villages along with their people in Afghanistan, demolishing houses over their sleeping residents in Palestine, killing the children of Iraq, and [consistent with] the right that the United States granted itself to kill any human being or arrest anyone anywhere.”