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AMERICAN MORNING

Suicide Sister; Rebuilding New Orleans; Airline Security Gap

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MILES O'BRIEN, CNN ANCHOR: So just who was Sajedah Al-Rashawi, the would-be suicide bomber in Jordan? A week after her ill-fated attempt to blow herself up, along with three other men at hotels in Jordan, we're still trying to connect the dots, so to speak, connect the dots. Scott Macleod is "Time" magazine's Middle East correspondent. He's been looking into her background and her motivations.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

M. O'BRIEN: Thanks very much for being with us, Scott. You've had a chance to put together some of the pieces here. What do we know about this woman now?

SCOTT MACLEOD, "TIME" MAGAZINE: Well, she was from a family that was heavily involved in the insurgency in Iraq, we know that. She's Iraqi. She's from the town of Ramadi, which as you know is one of the hotspots of the insurgency, has been since the beginning of the war. And the latest report we have is that three of her brothers, as well as her Jordanian brother-in-law, were involved in the insurgency, and all of them died in the insurgency, probably all as a result of U.S. strikes on their bases.

Do you have reason to believe that she became involved in the jihad as an act of vengeance on the part of the fact that her brother was killed in the battle of Fallujah?

MACLEOD: Well, the evidence we have about her comes from her confession on Jordanian television the other night, Sunday night, and she came across as somebody who was more or less dragged into the suicide operations in Amman. She didn't come off as some kind of heroic fighter, somebody out to avenge the deaths of her brothers, for example. She didn't even mention those in the tape that we saw on Jordanian TV. She came across as a very passive person. She kept referring all of the time to her husband did this, her husband told her to do that. And I think it's quite probable while she may have sympathized with the general cause, that she was not a gung ho participant.

M. O'BRIEN: Was it, in some way, a decoy marriage?

MACLEOD: That's my impression. They were married. We discovered at the last day of the Edel Setera (ph), the Islamic holiday that had just passed. That was about two weeks ago. And because of the very ultra-conservative nature of these Islamists, a woman could not travel on her own without a husband, a legal husband with her. So it's probable that they got married as a result of this operation in Jordan, perhaps as a decoy, as you say, to disguise that it's just a couple going across the Jordanian border who would arouse a lot less suspicion, and they were carrying false passports.

But if a man is traveling with a woman who appeared to be his wife, it would arouse less suspicion than if it were two or three men traveling together without any real reason to be going to Jordan.

Scott Macleod is with "Time" magazine. Thanks for joining us.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

S. O'BRIEN: Also this morning, we're talking about these devastating tornadoes that have absolutely destroyed the regions in Tennessee, but also people at the same time in Mississippi and New Orleans are trying to clean up from the hurricanes.

What would you do if you were the mayor of a city that was devastated by the season's hurricanes? You might want to turn to someone who has some experience in the area. Well, Joseph Riley, the mayor of Charleston, South Carolina, has some experience. He was first elected in mayor back in 1975. He's in New Orleans this morning.

And Mayor Riley, thank you for being with us. When I talk about experience, of course, we're talking about Hurricane Hugo, which really whopped your city very, very hard. Before we get to that, though, I want to talk about the meetings you've been having with the various mayors who have been affected in Biloxi, in Gulfport, in New Orleans. When you sat down with Ray Nagin, the mayor of New Orleans, what's his number one concern for you?

MAYOR JOSEPH RILEY, JR., CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA: For me, it was helping the mayor with the decisions that are before him now. The rebuilding of a hurricane brings maybe a generation's worth of decisions for a mayor to make about where to rebuild, how to rebuild, of what to do, the scale, the type, and all of that.

And so what we wanted to do is bring the experience of the Mayor's Institute for City Design, which is now 20 years old -- Mayor Nagin is a graduate of that -- and with resource people from around the country to come meet with the mayor here, as well as we did with the mayors of Gulfport, Biloxi, Ocean Springs, and other Gulfport cities to give them some resources, both now and the weeks and months to come to help the mayor be in the best position to make the key decisions.

Because the mayor is the chief urban design official of a city. In final analysis, those decisions about how a city can do in normal times is built or restored and certainly during these catastrophic times is built and restored comes to the mayor's desk. And we wanted to be here to help them be in the best position possible to make the best decisions for their community, which will have 50, 100-year impacts in terms of what is done. S. O'BRIEN: We're looking at pictures of New Orleans. When you look at these pictures -- and these are relatively recent pictures of the city in the wake of Hurricane Katrina -- I mean, they've got rebuilding on every front, whether you're talking about residences, you're talking about the downtown, you're talking about the levees. Where -- how do you advise them on how to start?

RILEY: You do a lot of things at the same time. The picture right behind me is very reminiscent of what we saw in Charleston. And I'm happy to tell you that was in 1989, and our city now is more beautiful than ever. And we worked very hard to make sure that we save every piece and every bit or fragment of the city that is there.

And that's one bit of advice to Mayor Nagin or to any mayor affected, is to be as industrious as you can about saving every possible piece that you can. And the encouraging fact is that cities rebuild in the history of time, whether it's, you know, London or Berlin or Munich or whether it's war or national disasters, the human spirit is strong. They built cities because they need them, and a natural disaster doesn't knock a city down forever.

Cities get rebuilt. And cities after natural disasters end up being better than they were. Hard to look at the pictures in New Orleans right now and understand that, but that's what happens. And that is what will happen here.

S. O'BRIEN: What were the lessons from Hurricane Hugo, which devastated Charleston, South Carolina? Really, I mean, even the town hall, kind of a metaphor, the roof ripped off. I mean, the whole city was just a disaster. What lessons did you take from Hugo that you were able to bring to these mayors and say here's specifically what we learned, here's what you can take away from my experience?

RILEY: Well, and the roof blew off City Hall while we were in City Hall. The first lesson is, and I mentioned, is that you do rebuild. You do it a moment at a time, a day at a time, a step at a time. You preserve what you can. Engage the people. It's very important, because there will be lots of planning decisions in front of New Orleans and Biloxi and Gulfport and all those cities right now. Make sure that the citizens feel a part of that. Because they need to be on board.

And then paint a picture for the citizens so that they see a future. Because people have been knocked down and psychologically, it's been very challenging. Help them see a picture of what the future is going to be. And then use it as an opportunity to really make the city better. There may be new public realm opportunities and park opportunities.

One of the ideas kicked around is with the levees is, they get restored. Make them public amenities. Use it as a way to get people closer to the water's edge, but help the citizens see not only a victory of just recovering, but you beat the natural disaster because you end up being better than you were before.

S. O'BRIEN: Mayor Joseph P. Riley created the Mayor's Institute on City Design. He is the mayor of Charleston, South Carolina. It's nice to see you, sir. Thank you very much for talking with us.

RILEY: Thank you.

M. O'BRIEN: Lots of food for thought there.

S. O'BRIEN: Yes.

M. O'BRIEN: Very interesting.

S. O'BRIEN: You know, and coming from someone who really literally has been through it, I'm sure, has to be -- has to give some relief to those mayors who are grappling with starting from zero.

M. O'BRIEN: Yes, let's hope they listen.

S. O'BRIEN: Yes.

M. O'BRIEN: Coming up, Wal-Mart under fire. A new movie, kind of a "Fahrenheit 911" style thing, takes aim at the

world's biggest retailer. But can a P.R. blitz keep the customers coming?

S. O'BRIEN: Plus, a really big gap in airport security. A look at why most of the cargo on passenger planes is never, ever screened. We explain that up next on AMERICAN MORNING.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

S. O'BRIEN: In our CNN "Security Watch" this morning, concerns about security measures for cargo on passenger planes. Could you be at risk? CNN homeland security correspondent Jeanne Meserve has our report.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JEANNE MESERVE, CNN HOMELAND SECURITY CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Airline passengers and their luggage go through painstaking, sometimes intrusive security screening, but most of the cargo underneath their feet does not, potentially leaving the door open for a terrorist attack.

REP. ED MARKEY (D), MASSACHUSETTS: Americans are really playing cargo roulette every time they get on a passenger plane.

MESERVE: In a new critical report, the Government Accountability Office says the Transportation Security Administration has not identified air cargo vulnerabilities, nor has it compiled data on air cargo security breaches that could reveal security weaknesses.

Because inspecting all of the 23 billion pounds of cargo shipped by air in the U.S. year could paralyze the economic system, the TSA is developing a method to target high-risk cargo. But the GAO says the agency's database contains information on only about one-third of the 1.5 million known shippers, and has not taken needed steps to identify shippers who may pose a security threat.

The GAO also says because certain cargo is exempt from random inspections because of its nature and size, the system could be open to attack. One analyst says the report and the threat should be put in context.

RICHARD FALKENRATH, CNN SECURITY: It's good to keep pressure on them, but we shouldn't focus on this single vulnerability in isolation from all the others. And we shouldn't expect the department to obsess and take care only of this threat, while there's so many others they have to deal with.

MESERVE (on camera): The Department of Homeland Security say the threat that terrorists will exploit vulnerabilities in the air-cargo system is real and a high priority. And while the department claims to make progress, it is not enough to silence the critics, or eliminate the threat.

Jeanne Meserve, CNN, Washington.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

S. O'BRIEN: You want to stay with CNN day and night for the most reliable news about your security -- Miles.

M. O'BRIEN: Coming up on the program, after a stretch of bad press, Wal-Mart goes on a so-called charm offensive, but is this something shoppers will buy, at any price? That's next on AMERICAN MORNING.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

M. O'BRIEN: In today's "Minding Your Business," Wal-Mart, the largest company in the world by revenue, posted its earnings yesterday, a record \$2.73 billion for the third quarter, up just 3.85 percent from the same time last year. Now that is tepid growth for Wal-Mart, but when it comes at a time hurricane shut down 300 of its stores and as the company tries to stem a crescendo of bad PR.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

M. O'BRIEN (voice-over): Wal-Mart, the largest retailer in the world, is now dealing with high volume trouble that's not so easy to discount. The latest exchange, a "Fahrenheit 9/11"-style movie called "Wal-Mart, The High Cost of Low Price." It accuses the company of exploiting its 1.2 million workers and wiping out mom-and-pop competitors.

In a recently leaked internal memo, Wal-Mart managers suggest the company avoid hiring unhealthy people in order to save health care premiums.

In September, a labor-rights group filed suit accusing Wal-Mart of allowing suppliers to operate sweat shops abroad.

Earlier this month, the Associated Press reported senior Wal-Mart executives knew cleaning contractors were housing illegal workers, often in the back of the stores.

And just yesterday, this.

SEN. EDWARD KENNEDY (D), MASSACHUSETTS: Wal-Mart sells itself as an all-American company, but it violates American family values every single day by mistreating its workers.

M. O'BRIEN: Senator Edward Kennedy aligned himself with the makers of that anti-Wal-Mart movie. So who's speaking for Wal-Mart? Well, Wal-Mart is, but so is this new pro-Wal-Mart movie made by Ron Galloway.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: So many people have so many negatives things to say about, but what about the positive things?

(END VIDEOTAPE)

M. O'BRIEN: We've got a little statement to share with you from Wal-Mart. "When confronted with the factual errors in his movie, Mr. Greenwald the maker of that movie we told you about at the beginning of that piece -- dodged he media's question. He also refused to disclose specifics about the groups and individuals that funded his video. Clearly this news conference and the video screening tonight, referring to yesterday's event in Washington, are just the latest in a multimillion-dollar negative attack campaign being run by paid critics."

Which brings us to our guest: Robert Berner covers Wal-Mart for "Businessweek." He's there retail correspondent. He joins us from Chicago.

Robert, let's talk about that. Wal-Mart seems to allude that this is some sort of organized campaign, perhaps unionized, or unions that are attempting to get inside Wal-Mart. Do you think that's what's happening?

ROBERT BERNER, "BUSINESSWEEK": Well, it started that way, Miles. Basically, Wal-Mart has been under attack by the unions, who've financed two groups that are anti-Wal-Mart groups. The most effective one is Wal-Mart Watch, and the other is Wake Up Wal-Mart. They -- the pressure -- what drove the unions in is that Wal-Mart, through its expansion of its supercenters, which sell groceries, have really started to put pressure on the traditional supermarket chains, which are unionized. So that's fueled the fire for the unions to back these two groups, Wal-Mart Watch, and Wake Up Wal-Mart.

M. O'BRIEN: And -- go ahead. Finish up.

BERNER: The other force here, I think it taps into a larger insecurity in the nation in terms of, you know, jobs and wage growth, and I think that's why you've seen Kennedy join the bandwagon yesterday.

M. O'BRIEN: All right, well, let's talk about that. In response to all of this, Wal-Mart if offering up -- they hired Edelman, a big, fancy PR firm.

BERNER: Right. M. O'BRIEN: In other words, in response to what seemed to be some substantive concern about wages and the way workers is treated is public relations, trying to put a little lipstick on a pig maybe. Is Wal-Mart going to succeed?

BERNER: Well, you know, one of their problems is they haven't had a coherent PR strategy until now. They really didn't respond as criticism started to build until this year. They have brought in Edelman, and they're treating this much like a political campaign, just like the unions are. So both sides are being very aggressive.

I don't think it's going to be effective. Wal-Mart has gotten so large, and they've become a lightning rod. And so I don't think they're going to be able to stem the tide.

M. O'BRIEN: One way to stem the tide would be to perhaps treat workers better. Is that just...

BERNER: That's a really -- that's the heart of the issue. This gets down to Wal-Mart's business model. I mean, they're model has always been low cost and low prices, and you know, paying low wages and meager benefits is part of that.

And so I met with Lee Scott, the CEO, about a month ago. And he says he doesn't plan to change Wal-Mart's business model, that he can't afford to with competitors like Target and a resurgent K-Mart. But in the end, I think he might have to. He's going to face too much pressure.

M. O'BRIEN: Well, it's interesting, Wal-Mart employees are also Wal-Mart customers as well, and they might be able to spend a little more at the retailer as well. That's just my armchair economics for the morning. "Businessweek" reporter, he covers retail. What do I know?

Robert Berner in Chicago, thanks for being with us -- Soledad.

S. O'BRIEN: Miles, coming up this morning, the very latest on that devastating storm system that is now moving across the United States.

We've got an update on the path just ahead on AMERICAN MORNING.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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