



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 28, 2010

Abdulmutallab's Inept Interrogation

Everyday major media outlets document the inexplicable and inexcusable dereliction of duty on the part of agencies within the U.S. government charged with safeguarding the skies and shores of the United States from terrorist attack. The latest recrimination comes from the *Wall Street Journal* where a story was printed Tuesday that exposed frightening failures in the functioning of government intelligence and security officials.



The article cites the embarrassing testimony of Dennis Blair, the Director of National Intelligence. The *Journal* reports that when asked why the government failed to utilize the Obama administration's much-vaunted High Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG) to interrogate Umar Abdulmutallab, Blair stammered, hemmed, hawed, and had no acceptable answer to the lawmakers' inquiry into this apparent misstep.

The HIG was the subject of [an article in *The New American*](#) on August 27, 2009. The article explained that the president's primary purpose in forming the group was to "gather valuable intelligence in order to prevent future terrorist attacks." That was three and one-half months before the Fort Hood shootings, perpetrated by a military officer who was freely emailing an al-Qaeda associate about the religious justification for killing his fellow soldiers, despite being monitored for nearly a year by a branch of the American intelligence apparatus. And it was nearly four months before Abdulmutallab almost blew up an airliner over Detroit that would have almost certainly killed nearly 300 crew and passengers. Abdulmutallab's association with terrorists was documented and known to American intelligence and security concerns, as well.

The story set out by the *Wall Street Journal* and the [Associated Press](#) is stunning and gives a head-shaking synopsis of how bumbling, bungling, and befuddled the feds were in their treatment of Abdulmutallab after he was taken into custody on Christmas Day in Detroit.

As the day unfolded, the 23 year-old Nigerian was taken to the hospital by agents of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and local metro Detroit police officers. Reportedly, while in the custody of these law enforcement officials, Abdulmutallab mumbled something about trying "blow up the plane."

About 2:15 that afternoon, special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation working out of the Detroit office arrived and recorded conversations with Abdulmutallab wherein he confessed to being trained by al-Qaeda in Yemen. The would-be terrorist continued babbling for nearly an hour without being read his Miranda rights under an exception providing interrogators with a window through which they can prevent an imminent additional attack. After that, agents let up on Abdulmutallab when they



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realized he was under the influence of some sort of medication and they didn't want his responses to be tainted by any sort of drug.

At about 8 o'clock that evening, FBI big wigs at the Bureau's headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, instructed the local agents to send in a "clean team" to conduct a second interview.

The Associated Press explains the call to the bullpen this way: "By bringing in a so-called 'clean team' of investigators to talk to the suspect, federal officials aimed to ensure that Abdulmutallab's statements would still be admissible if the failure to give him his Miranda warning led a judge to rule out the use of his first admissions."

At the end of the day, however, this "clean team" turned out to be no dream team and failed to elicit any additional revelations or admissions from Abdulmutallab. Why? Because after being allowed to rest and revive for five hours, the erstwhile university student was read his Miranda warnings and apparently understood every word, for from that point forward he never uttered another word.

The \$64,000 question is why would a foreign national with obvious terroristic intent coupled with an undeniable attempt to harm nearly 300 fellow passengers be read Miranda warnings that the U.S. Supreme Court has deemed a fundamental and requisite part of the rights against self-incrimination by the Fifth Amendment?

Fox New's Chris Wallace posed this question during an [interview with the White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs](#). Predictably, Gibbs denied the President knew anything of the R&R the feds so graciously afforded their suspect and pointed the finger at "the Justice Department and the FBI." Reluctant to just throw the Justice Department and FBI under the bus, Gibbs reassured Wallace (and America) that even though the interrogation lasted less than an hour, the interrogation crew gained "valuable intelligence."

So, to sum up, the universe of questions and probing of a man with admitted terrorist ties and undeniable terrorist intent consisted of less than an hour's worth of questions by a hodgepodge of federal and local law enforcement agents, none of whom was part of the HIG, a cadre of intelligence and interrogation experts whose sole mission is the execution of such high-value interviews with high-value suspects. The dream team was AWOL and the "clean team" was delinquent.

Strictly speaking, however, according to [testimony provided by FBI Director Robert Mueller](#) to a congressional committee investigating the narrowly averted attack, the HIG wasn't missing because it has yet to be formed. Not only that, but spokesmen for the Obama administration state that the President has yet to decide whether the HIG will be used for domestic interrogations or strictly overseas. Of course, that deliberation is all academic as there is still no such thing as the HIG.

Regardless of the lack of participation of a specially trained group in the interrogation of Umar Abdulmutallab, there would have been little more intelligence of any worth gleaned from him anyway as the President and the Attorney General Eric Holder have hewn rigidly to the proposition that terrorists and attempted terrorists will enjoy the same Supreme Court interpretations of constitutional privileges and immunities as citizens of the United States of America. President Obama has firmly fixed his opinion to the position that such suspects, for whatever reason, will be Mirandized and to them will be extended all the due process protections available to any other defendant. This is the rub. This, even more than the 50-minute interviews and resting periods given to would-be terrorists caught in the act of killing hundreds of innocent Americans, is the reason why the U.S. government continues to be unforgivably complicit in the demise of the world's greatest republic.

Photo of Abdulmutallab: AP Images



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This article has been revised to clarify that Miranda rights are not part of the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.



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