



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on February 4, 2010

## Insecure Americans, Abdulmutallab, & Terrorism

On January 9, 2010, an apparently fit, though slightly limping Umar Abdulmutallab entered the courtroom wearing the familiar khaki trousers, plain white t-shirt, and ankle bracelets that are the usual uniform of federal prisoners. The defendant was flanked by his attorney, a federal public defender, Miriam Siefer. Abdulmutallab was arraigned in a Detroit federal court. The 23-year-old Nigerian stood before a magistrate, and Siefer pled not guilty to all charges on behalf of her client.



The hearing was presided over by magistrate Mark Randon, who repeatedly asked Abdulmutallab if he specifically understood the charges that were being made against him and whether he understood the purpose and process of the proceedings generally. In a voice barely audible, Abdulmutallab responded in the affirmative, and in response to a question regarding his present state of mind, he informed the judge that he had taken painkillers, but was otherwise lucid and not under the effects of any other medication.

As the last piece of perfunctory procedure, Abdulmutallab's lawyers agreed to waive a formal reading of the charges and consented to their client's continued confinement in the Federal Corrections Institute Milan, a low-security facility located about 45 miles south of Detroit.

In all, the hearing lasted about five minutes, and at the conclusion Abdulmutallab, his shaved head bowed, was escorted from the courtroom by federal law-enforcement officers in the company of his attorneys.

Meanwhile, the government's top lawyer, Attorney General Eric Holder, reported that life imprisonment is the maximum penalty for the crimes of which Abdulmutallab has been charged. Holder also said that Abdulmutallab was cooperating with federal investigators and was providing detailed information about the al-Qaeda branch in Yemen that is reckoned to have trained and equipped the young Nigerian in advance of his nearly fatal Christmas Day attack.

### **Path From Privilege to Terror**

What led to the erstwhile student's conversion to the most radical, violent fringes of Islam? How did a young man from a well-to-do family become so tragically and totally deracinated from a childhood that was affluent and not noticeably devout? Naturally, the entire truth will never be known. Although there will always be questions without corresponding answers and the perverted mind of a terrorist will



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always be inscrutable, in the case of Umar Abdulmutallab, there is a trail of terror marked by brightly painted warning signs, alerting all to the threat potentially posed by Abdulmutallab. One of the first and largest warning signs was painted and erected by none other than Abdulmutallab's own father.

Dr. Alhaji Umaru Abdulmutallab is a successful and, by all accounts, wealthy bank executive and former government minister who gave his son the best of everything — education at the best African and British schools, a luxurious apartment worth nearly \$4 million where the young Abdulmutallab lived while studying in London, a life of comfort, and every amenity. None of this advantage and privilege prevented Abdulmutallab the younger from descending into the dank and designing underworld of Islamic terrorism as preached and practiced by al-Qaeda.

Days after the attempted bombing of Flight 253, Dr. Abdulmutallab, on behalf of his family, published an open letter to the world, apologizing for the acts of his son. The letter reads in part:

Our family, like the rest of the world, [were] woken up in the early hours of Saturday, 26th December, 2009 to the news of an attempt to blow up a plane by a young Nigerian man, who was later identified as Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab is the son of Alhaji (Dr.) Umaru Abdulmutallab, the head of this Family.

The letter goes on to explain that Umar Abdulmutallab's terroristic behavior was not unexpected. Four months prior to the attempted attack, Dr. Abdulmutallab approached Nigerian authorities and warned them of his son's detachment and devotion to a brand of Islam that worried him and piqued his paternal protective instinct.

Nigerian authorities listened to Dr. Abdulmutallab and advised him to communicate his concerns, along with the evidence of his son's radicalism, to officers at the American embassy. After the interview with Dr. Abdulmutallab, the CIA officers who met with him at the embassy in Nigeria supposedly sent the information on to the State Department, where it was treated with only tepid interest. Abdulmutallab's name was entered in a database of people with suspected ties to terrorism (a list of about half a million names), not, as one would reasonably expect given the specificity of the young man's new and nefarious ties and extremist behavior, on the much smaller "no-fly list," whose total roster is about 4,000 people. There is even an intermediate list of about 14,000 names of people whose record is sufficiently questionable so as to warrant a mandatory secondary search should they try to board a plane bound for the United States.

### **A Deadly Tear in the Security Blanket**

With such reliable and credible intelligence, one would imagine that the American security and intelligence network would have flaunted their post-9/11 cooperation and demonstrated the effective exercise of Patriot Act protective prowess. It didn't work out that way. After the attack, CIA spokesmen shockingly admitted that they not only had the testimony of the would-be bomber's father, but that the agency was also earlier alerted as to not only the nationality (Nigerian) of the suspected terrorist, but to the country (Yemen) wherein he was contacting known al-Qaeda operatives. In its defense the CIA avers that it "didn't know the name" of the individual classified as a clear and present danger to the safety of the United States. Such a weak demurral is difficult to believe given the fact that the primary source of credible information about the man was provided by his own father, someone likely to know the name of the "Nigerian" meeting with terrorists in Yemen.

In light of the rampant ineptitude of the supposedly revamped (and grossly overpowered) American intelligence network, a network that was properly diagnosed in the aftermath of the Ft. Hood massacre



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in November as anemic, culpable, and inept, it should not be surprising that the holes in our safety net are wide and numerous. President Obama himself denounced the system's nearly disastrous display of incomprehensible communication worthy of the Tower of Babel. "It now appears that weeks ago this information was passed to a component of our intelligence community but was not effectively distributed so as to get the suspect's name on a no-fly list," Mr. Obama said of the father's warning. "There appear to be other deficiencies as well. Even without this one report, there were bits of information available within the intelligence community that could have and should have been pieced together."

The bottom line regarding all the warnings, red flags, recriminations, tips, and terroristic leanings is that nearly 300 people are fortunate to be alive today. If the apparatus carried on board Northwest Flight 253 by Umar Abdulmutallab had functioned as intended, a gaping hole would have been blown in the side of that airplane and all those on board would almost certainly have perished. Likewise, if there were not such a gaping hole in the wall of security erected around the United States, then a man with known ties to terror would never have been permitted to board that plane in the first place. There are crucial questions, and the American people must demand answers. With the existence of at least 20 security and intelligence agencies monitoring our safety, we should not have to rely on luck for our protection.

### **Yemen: ?Hospitable Home to Terrorists**

Yemeni intelligence officials recently released the result of an investigation that has revealed that, as reported by his father and communicated to American and foreign intelligence agencies, Umar Abdulmutallab met in Yemen with known al-Qaeda operatives, probably including American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.

The investigation's report was announced by Rashad al-Alimi, Nigerian Deputy Prime Minister for National Security. The report indicates that Yemen was not, however, where Abdulmutallab obtained the explosive device intended to bring down the airliner. According to the document, the bomb and the syringe that was designed to deliver the accelerant that would detonate the explosive powder were both obtained by Abdulmutallab in Lagos, where he changed planes and headed for Amsterdam, then onto a Detroit-bound connection.

This account of events leading up to Abdulmutallab's thwarted terrorist attack differed from the official version offered by the governments of Nigeria, Holland, and the United Kingdom. Specifically, the Yemeni report cited by al-Alimi disagrees with previous findings regarding where Abdulmutallab was recruited, where he obtained the bomb, and how long he spent in a Lagos airport.

All other official narratives claim that Abdulmutallab flew from Ghana on December 24 and had a layover in Lagos while waiting to board the flight that would take him to Amsterdam and then on to Detroit the next day. Anonymous American officials have claimed that Abdulmutallab informed FBI interrogators that he obtained the bomb from terrorists in Yemen.

As for the site of Abdulmutallab's recruitment by al-Qaeda, al-Alimi points the finger at England, specifically the University College of London, where the young Nigerian Muslim served as president of a Muslim student association. "From 2005 on, he [Abdulmutallab] was absorbed by extremists in Britain, that is the reason he was not able to come back to Britain. Yemen was not informed by the U.S. or British authorities that there were concerns about him," al-Alimi told reporters at a January 7, 2010 press conference.



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Scotland Yard refused to comment as to their position on the role English-based extremists played in the recruitment of Abdulmutallab to the cause of jihad. Officially, the government of the U.K. admits that Abdulmutallab met with known “extremists” while in London, but denies that any of his activities there rose to the level of a credible terrorist threat.

### **Anwar al-Awlaki: ?Evangelist of Hate and Harm**

The Nigerian government’s statement reveals that Abdulmutallab’s devotion to radical Islam was midwifed by none other than Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born, Yemen-based imam known to have participated significantly in the radicalization of Major Nidal Hasan, the Army psychiatrist accused of murdering 13 people at Ft. Hood, Texas, on November 5 of last year. According to various published reports, Abdulmutallab met with several known al-Qaeda leaders in a home in Shabwa, Yemen, including al-Awlaki. “There is no doubt he met with al-Qaeda elements in Shabwa, including likely with Awlaki,” al-Alimi told reporters.

American intelligence officials are investigating the possible role al-Awlaki played in planning or promoting the botched Christmas Day bombing, but to date have made no official comment on the subject.

It is known, however, that on December 24 the Yemeni military bombed targets suspected to be al-Qaeda gathering spots, including one frequented by al-Awlaki. Yemeni military officials reported that 30 people were killed in the pre-dawn raids, but it was unclear whether al-Awlaki was among them. Al-Awlaki’s family in Yemen, however, reported that the radical cleric was not among the victims and that he was yet alive.

No one as yet has presented any reliable proof that al-Awlaki met with Abdulmutallab or that he is associated with the al-Qaeda branch that has claimed responsibility for the Christmas Day attempted bombing. This dearth of intelligence has not stopped the government in Yemen from describing the American expatriate as “the most dangerous man in Yemen.” Given that nation’s record of accommodating terrorists of all sorts (including pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden), that is quite a remarkable distinction.

There are those coming to al-Awlaki’s defense, however. People brave enough to identify themselves as friends of the Internet-savvy evangelist deny that he is a member of al-Qaeda (or any other terrorist organization), and refute the generally held perception that he is a radical muckraker who condones and encourages violence. Despite their disavowals, though, it is known that al-Awlaki described the Ft. Hood shooter as a “hero” and called upon other Muslims in the American military to “follow in his footsteps.” Not exactly the behavior of a peace-loving holy man.

### **Scanners and Security: ?Civil Liberty Lost at the Border**

The new millimeter-wave scanners soon to be deployed in airports throughout the United States would not have detected the explosive device smuggled aboard Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day by Umar Abdulmutallab.

According to a report recently released by firms in the United Kingdom that have tested the hi-tech scanners, the chemical explosive carried by Abdulmutallab in his underwear would not have shown up had he passed through one of the devices, owing to the low density of the material. In the analysis, experts warn that despite the nearly universal mandate by government officials to install the scanners in the wake of the thwarted terrorist attempt in Detroit, liquids, chemicals, and plastics are too low in density to be picked up by the waves used in the scanners, and only more traditional weapons (knives,



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guns, etc.) hidden under the clothing are effectively revealed by the devices. The potentially lethal medium of mayhem chosen by Umar Abdulmutallab (or his handlers) was 80 grams of pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) in powdered form that was to be detonated by a liquid accelerant contained in a syringe that malfunctioned.

Ben Wallace, a member of the U.K. Parliament and former executive of a British firm that researched the effectiveness of such scanners, told reporters that as early as 2005 his company informed the British government that the millimeter-waves used in the scanners pass through low-density objects such as those listed above, allowing them to be successfully smuggled aboard airplanes. It makes sense that such materials would be “invisible” to the scanners, as they are essentially made of the same material as the clothing they so embarrassingly disregard.

“Body scanning is only half the story, though,” said Kevin Murphy, a product manager at Qinetiq, one of the organizations that evaluated the scanners’ effectiveness back in 2005. “The government cannot ignore the liquid aspect any more. Liquid explosive became a high-agenda issue following the thwarted transatlantic bomb plot of 2006 and is clearly implicated in the attempted downing of Northwest Flight 253. If the government skirts over this aspect it will be nothing short of a dereliction of duty,” he continued. Murphy’s comments should not be ignored given the knee-jerk reaction by governments across the globe to install these scanners as the panacea to the terrorism epidemic, and the subsequent fact that everyone traveling into and eventually everyone traveling within the United States will be treated as a suspect, regardless of reasonable suspicion of questionable intent, and subjected to the scan and display of private areas of their bodies.

In defiance of the relevant scientific findings, however, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) ordered \$165 million worth of millimeter-wave whole-body scanners from New York City-based defense contractor L-3 Communications. The purchase is stunning in light of the foreknowledge possessed by TSA authorities and their bosses in the Obama administration that the scanners simply will not, in fact cannot, detect the weapons whose existence they are using to justify the increase in security and concomitant decrease in personal liberty. The puzzling question becomes, why would TSA and President Obama obstinately insist on the immediate installation of such machines knowing beforehand that they are incapable of performing the crucial task for which they are ostensibly being deployed?

When Richard Reid hid a bomb in his shoe, travelers thereafter had to remove their shoes. Along comes Umar Abdulmutallab with a bomb hidden in his underwear, and travelers will soon be required to expose the most intimate parts of their bodies to a humiliating full-body scan. The next al-Qaeda gambit is impossible to predict, but there are myriad locations where a bomb could be secreted. For example, there is the frightening prospect of a rectally implanted chemical bomb that is designed to be detonated by exposure to urine in an airplane bathroom. This is one of many similar scenarios that must just as easily occur to terrorists as to writers. What must also occur to those who would threaten the peace and security of the citizens of the United States and American interests abroad is that the government’s response to the latest attempt to terrorize this country is inept, ineffective, and inexplicable given the published science and legitimate privacy issues.

### **Inferences**

The final analyses of the reasons why America’s intelligence apparatus failed so miserably to act on credible evidence of a potential attack on American soil (even if the information was, as the agencies claim, “vague”) will likely never be available. However, a study of the facts of the case confirms that



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had the diverse branches of the American intelligence establishment diligently collected, collated, and communicated the snapshots of information it received in advance of the Christmas Day attack — that is, if they had functioned the way they were intended after the network was revamped and revitalized in the hysterical zeal for heightened security that arose after 9/11 — then in all likelihood Umar Abdulmutallab would have been denied entry into the United States.

Remarkably and unforgivably, the harrowing portrait of terror that would have been painted on Christmas Day in Detroit was averted because of a malfunctioning detonator. Hundreds are alive today thanks to shoddy al-Qaeda engineering. The official American (and European) points of contact along the trail of terrorism walked by Abdulmutallab should have sensed the urgency in the data they received about a Nigerian in Yemen with evil intent. Had these professionals performed as they have been trained, then they could have seen the picture and demonstrated to the American people (and the world) that they merit the substantial panoply of responsibilities with which they were empowered after 9/11. This is not what happened, however. The intelligence community failed the American people with nearly fatal results.

If the solid credible evidence pointing to the clear and present danger posed by Umar Abdulmutallab could not be discerned by American security and intelligence officials, then there is little hope that a further surrender of freedom and dignity will do much to obviate future attempts to kill Americans or destroy their interests around the globe.

Furthermore, the question that must be asked (and inexplicably never is asked) is why this wall, this impenetrable wall of safety erected to protect America and her citizens from the murderous designs of terrorists and their dupes, must be built by government masons. Why, indeed, must the bricks themselves be government-issue bricks? Why must the mortar be mixed by government hod carriers? Few would dispute that there are scores of skilled civilian tradesman that could build a wall stronger and higher than the workers hired by the government. And when it comes to staffing the sentinels that stand guard atop that wall, must we always look to the government, to bureaucrats?

Tragically (and repeatedly) the barriers built by bureaucrats have failed to impede the passage of perpetrators. The government-sponsored guards posted on our barriers too often have unforgivably ignored the encroachment of foes despite obvious forewarnings; have bungled the communication of credible intelligence, the satisfactory sharing of which would have prevented death and destruction; and have childishly pointed fingers of blame at one another once the harm has been done and the subsequent recriminations have begun.

As Judge Andrew Napolitano so sagaciously observed, “The government can’t deliver the mail, it can’t operate surveillance cameras at an airport; it can’t pay back its debts; it can’t tell the truth.” The judge’s assessment is true for the services he lists, and it is equally true of protecting our airlines from future assaults by those dedicated to the destruction of the United States and the disruption of our peace.

Now is the time to consider a new paradigm. Now is the time for private industry to do what it has always done so well in the past: protect its own interests and those of its consumers through innovations and inventions, the creation of which is fueled by the fire of competition and enlightened self-interest. America will be safer and her enemies will cower if we unrepentantly begin to exercise the inalienable and God-given right of self-defense that has made us free and kept us free for hundreds of years. We must allow airlines to protect their passengers in the manner they deem most effective, for if we persist in our reliance on government for our safety, for its part it will persist in demanding the



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continuing sacrifice of our sacred liberty and in return will treat us as slaves chained with the shackles we forged ourselves.

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