



Written by on January 6, 2010

Obama Critical of Intelligence in Christmas Day Plot

President Obama said on January 5, following a meeting with members of his national security team, that U.S. intelligence had gathered enough information to uncover the plot to bomb a Northwest Airlines plane enroute to Detroit, but "failed" to piece it all together before the plane departed.

The president, who said he had met with intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement agencies involved in the security reviews, said: "The U.S. government had sufficient information to have uncovered this plot and potentially disrupt the Christmas Day attack. But our intelligence community failed to connect those dots, which would have placed the suspect on the 'no fly' list."



The president continued:

Now, I will accept that intelligence, by its nature, is imperfect, but it is increasingly clear that intelligence was not fully analyzed or fully leveraged. That's not acceptable, and I will not tolerate it. Time and again, we've learned that quickly piecing together information and taking swift action is critical to staying one step ahead of a nimble adversary.

Obama stated that he had ordered certain changes in airline security following the incident and revealed additional steps he believe needed to be taken:

Immediately after the attack, I ordered concrete steps to protect the American people: new screening and security for all flights, domestic and international; more explosive detection teams at airports; more air marshals on flights; and deepening cooperation with international partners.

In recent days, we've taken additional steps to improve security. Counterterrorism officials have reviewed and updated our terrorist watch list system, including adding more individuals to the "no fly" list. And while our review has found that our watch-listing system is not broken, the failure to add [Umar Farouk] Abdulmutallab to the "no fly" list shows that this system needs to be strengthened.

According to a report in VOA news, following a meeting with the president, National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair promised to "outwork, outthink and defeat" new terrorist tactics and said intelligence agencies will do what is necessary to prevent future terrorist attacks.

While the Christmas Day plot (as with the devastating attacks on September 11, 2001) revealed obvious failures in our nation's ability to interdict the work of terrorists before they implement that plans, that intelligence failure is the result of years of neglect, and cannot easily be corrected by using quick-fix measures that do more to inconvenience airline passengers and invade their privacy than to thwart



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terrorists.

During his address, President Obama noted that the failure to add Umar Abdulmutallab to the no-fly list indicated that our security system needed to be strengthened. Such neglect, however, was not a one-time aberration, but part of a systemic, years-long pattern that existed at the time of the 9-11 attacks. A prime example is the case of Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th 9/11 hijacker, because he was believed to have been slated to serve as a replacement for one of the hijackers who could not participate because of visa denials.

In August 2001, Mousaoui enrolled in flight training at Pan-Am International Flight Academy in Eagen, Minnesota. Because of his suspicious behavior, a supervisor from the flight school reported Mousaoui to the FBI. He warned that Moussaoui "wants training on a 747. A 747 fully loaded with fuel could be used as a weapon!"

On August 16, Moussaoui was arrested by FBI and INS agents and charged with an immigration violation. When arrested, he was in possession of a laptop computer, two knives, flight manuals for Boeing 747s, a flight simulator computer program, fighting gloves and shin guards, and a computer disk with information about crop dusting.

Because the agents suspected that Moussaoui intended to use his flight training for violent purposes, the Minnesota bureau of the FBI tried to get permission to search his laptop, which they were denied. When an FBI agent requested permission to search Moussaoui's rooms, he was also turned down.

As William Norman Grigg noted in his article "Foreknowledge and Failure," in *The New American* for June 17, 2002:

In a memo written and hand-delivered to FBI Director Robert Mueller in May, whistleblower Coleen Rowley, the Minneapolis FBI Legal Counsel, described how the Bureau's headquarters worked to "deliberately sabotage" the investigation of Zacarias Moussaoui, a suspected conspirator in the September 11th attack. According to Rowley, "HQ personnel never disclosed to the Minneapolis agents that the Phoenix division had, only approximately three weeks earlier, warned of al-Qaeda operatives in flight schools seeking flight training for terrorist purposes!"

A report in the *New York Times* for May 15, 2002 noted that Moussaoui "had told the school's instructors that he wanted to train on a flight simulator trip from Heathrow Airport in London to Kennedy Airport in New York. Based on that information, one [FBI] agent speculated in an internal meeting last August [2001] that ... Moussaoui might have intended to crash a plane into the [World] Trade Center...."

And the *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 20, 2002:

A week before the September 11th attack, investigators told the Federal Aviation Administration that student-pilot Zacarias Moussaoui had been arrested and was under investigation as a potential terrorist with a particular interest in flying Boeing 747s. But the agency decided against warning U.S. airlines to increase security.

"Nothing [the FBI] told us was evidence that there was an imminent threat and as a result we issued no bulletins to the airlines or airports," explained FAA spokesman Scott Brenner. "All we knew was he was in jail. As a result of him being in jail, we did not think a threat was imminent."

Though the security failures in both the Moussaoui and Abdulmutallab cases are obvious, our government's response has been to subject law-abiding U.S. citizens to an increasingly higher level of



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inspection during the pre-flight boarding process. However, not only do such procedures impose an unacceptable level of privacy invasion on all passengers, treating them as potential terrorists, they fail to address the greater national-security problem.

America has enemies and those enemies will utilize every method available to infiltrate our nation and do us harm. These threats can only be prevented by securing our porous borders, keeping better track of aliens who enter our country on work and study visas, and restoring our domestic security multilayered (local, state, and national) national-security safeguards (as opposed to building a centralized police-state apparatus in Washington that views every American as suspicious). At the height of the Cold War, our nation's security agencies protected us against the Soviet's KGB spy machine, which was had far more sophisticated resources than anything al Qaeda can marshal.

One step in the right direction would be to reinstate the abandoned Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, which was abolished in 1977, and the House Committee on Internal Security, abolished in 1975. Both congressional committees provided excellent leadership and oversight to successfully secure our nation against highly trained foreign agents intent on doing us harm. Perhaps even more important, because such committees were created by a Congress directly answerable to the American people, they posed far less threat to our civil liberties than appointed executive branch bureaucrats in agencies such as Homeland Security.

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