



Security Sieve Through Which Abdulmutallab Passed: Who's to Blame?

Reports from two investigations into the intelligence community's mishandling of crucial information relevant to the attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 by Nigerian Umar Abdulmutallab are being released today. President Obama ordered the probes after initial investigations in wake of the failed terrorist attack revealed that the CIA, the State Department, and the Department of Homeland Security all had foreknowledge of a Nigerian whose father reported had adopted extremist views was in Yemen receiving training from known al-Qaeda operatives based in that country.



Although representatives of the various agencies deny that they ever had a name attached to the description, critics decry such sidesteps as deplorable pretexts for indefensible systemic breakdowns that could very easily have resulted in the death of nearly 300 innocent people aboard the flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day.

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") won't be available until later today, but preliminary perusal of the digests confirm that 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 to say, 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 based on the findings that would have resulted from the intrusive secondary screening through which he should have had to pass given his allegiances and suspicious behavior prior to getting on board his target flight in Amsterdam.

Woulda, shoulda, coulda. That's the best the American security system can do, apparently. The harrowing picture 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.

How did this happen? How did so many people with so much information from so many sources so universally ignore so many red flags? The answers will never be satisfying for that would weaken the flimsy platform upon which the eradication of civil liberties was built after 9/11.



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on December 31, 2009

Portions of the reports have been leaked and the reaction to them is predictable. Congressmen on both sides of the aisle will blame the other party for obstructionist tactics that have thwarted the development of a potent national security scheme. Republicans will excoriate President Obama for being soft on terror. Democrats will rail against past administrations for bowing to partisan pressure and erecting inadequate barriers around our country. The fraternity of intelligence and security departments (CIA, FBI, DHS, National Counterterrorism Center) will point fingers at one another and place blame for the negligence at each other's feet while extolling their own handling of the case, thus justifying their continued support. The shuttering of the prison at Guantanamo Bay will be delayed indefinitely as dots are connected between inmates and the al-Qaeda cell based in Yemen. Finally, the crescendo of calls for increased airport security will culminate in the installation of full-body scanners in airports throughout the nation (Holland and Nigeria have already announced such designs).

While this predictable pantomime plays out in the media, there is evidence that Yemeni members of al-Qaeda may have attempted a similar attempt to bomb an aircraft in Somalia earlier in the year. In a statement issued by the Somali mission to the United Nations, officials from that African nation describe an incident on November 13 where African Union troops arrested a young man before he boarded a plane in Mogadishu bound for Dubai. The apprehension was reportedly a coordinated effort between Somali and Yemeni intelligence agencies. Officials familiar with the facts of this foiled attack describe the weapon intended to be employed in the attack was "exactly similar" to the PETN explosives sewn into Abdulmutallab's underwear and the liquid filled syringe with which he attempted to detonate the device. In a display of surprising rapidity of reaction, especially in light of their very recent history of systematic lassitude, American intelligence officials are investigating the possibility of connection between the two plots.

Officers in Africa and the United States have yet to discover a link between al-Qaeda and the Somali situation. If such a nexus is found, however, suspicion will grow of a more widespread and thoroughly planned al-Qaeda plot to use its trainees to deploy syringe-activated devices in planes worldwide. There is evidence of the existence of such a plan. If al-Qaeda's fingerprints are found on the Somali weapon, then this will be the third attempt in less than one year to use a syringe as a vehicle for a liquid to ignite a powdered explosive.

In August of 2009, such an implement was smuggled from Yemen to Saudi Arabia in the underpants of an al-Qaeda operative attending a meeting he set-up under questionable contrivances with the Saudi interior minister, Prince Nayef. The terrorist successfully detonated the bomb; however, the prince survived the assassination attempt while the terrorist himself perished in the effort.

The involucration of these terrorist activities within the shell of a Yemeni-based al-Qaeda branch has brought unwelcomed military attention to the small nation on the Arab peninsula. Last week Yemeni air forces bombed the suspected meeting place of high-level local al-Qaeda members (including Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born imam whose noxious dogma has reputedly attracted several converts). And today, Yemeni military representatives announced its forces had attacked an al-Qaeda outpost ensconced in the Hudaydah province along the Red Sea coast resulting in apprehension of at least one suspected terrorist.

Photo of Umar Abdulmutallab: AP Images



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