

The airplane bomb plot: Obama continues the cover-up

By Patrick Martin
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The statement made by President Barack Obama Thursday about the Christmas Day attempted bombing of a Northwest Airlines flight over Detroit is a continuation of a government-wide cover-up, aided and abetted by the media, of the actions of US intelligence and security agencies in the period leading up to the failed terrorist attack.

Obama repeated the meaningless phrase that has become the mantra of such cover-ups since the attacks of September 11, 2001—“failure to connect the dots”—and gave explicit assurances that no officer of any intelligence agency will suffer any consequences for what is arguably the greatest security failure since 9/11.

The president’s remarks continue the pattern established since the young Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, tried and failed to ignite a plastic explosive sown into his underwear as Northwest Flight 253 was in its final descent towards Detroit.

In the two weeks since the incident, there has been no coherent or credible explanation of how it was possible for Abdulmutallab to board the US-bound plane despite the mass of information available to US security agencies, including the visit by his father to the US embassy in Nigeria more than a month before the flight.

Obama admitted that US intelligence agencies had sufficient information to identify Abdulmutallab as a likely threat and place him on the no-fly list. He reiterated that there was not a failure to collect information, but rather a failure to connect disparate pieces, with the result that “a known terrorist” was allowed to board the plane in Amsterdam.

This was followed by the declaration that “no one individual and no single agency was at fault,” a claim that amounts to a blanket assertion of immunity for all those involved. It is also deliberately deceptive, since it suggests that inter-agency coordination was the problem in preventing action from being taken.

The executive summary of the administration review of the incident, released in a declassified form at the time of Obama’s statement, contradicts this implication, however.

The summary reveals that both the CIA and the National Counter-Terrorism Center, separately and independently of each other, had all the information necessary to identify Abdulmutallab.

According to the summary, key “dots” to be connected were (1) plans by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to attack the United States, (2) its recruitment of a Nigerian for that purpose, and (3) Abdulmutallab’s departure to Yemen to join an extremist organization. The document declares: “all of that information was available to all-source analysts at the CIA and the NCTC prior to the attempted attack...”

Taken at its face value, this would suggest that the security failure on December 25, 2009 was even greater than that on September 11, 2001. The official explanation of the failure to stop the 9/11 attacks is that the CIA, the FBI and other security agencies each possessed part of the information needed to detect and forestall the terrorist hijackings, but that bureaucratic power struggles and refusal to share information across the “wall” prevented timely identification and coordinated action.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has written extensively against this official cover story for 9/11, but it is more plausible than the explanation now given for the failure to prevent the Christmas bomber from boarding the Northwest flight. By Obama’s own report, two separate government agencies, the CIA and the NCTC, had all the information needed to identify the bomber, but both agencies, each acting on their own, somehow failed to do so. And this simultaneous double failure took place even though the NCTC was established after 9/11 for the ostensible purpose of serving as the central “dot-connector” for the entire US intelligence apparatus.

Moreover, as we have previously explained, the “connecting the dots” metaphor suggests a mass of information in which each piece of data, taken separately, is not incriminating, and that only someone in possession of all the information can detect a sinister pattern embedded in it. In the case of the Christmas Day bombing attempt, however, each major piece of data was an alarm bell. To ignore these

alarms, as both the CIA and the NCTC did, suggests conscious, willful inaction, not mere incompetence.

There is one other aspect of Obama's statement worth noting. He has a well-practiced habit of adopting whatever persona seems politically necessary—in this case, striking the pose of purposeful determination appropriate to the "commander in chief." He spoke in short, declarative sentences, punctuated with clichés like "The buck stops here." He took no questions, and left the media to be briefed by two top security officials, White House terrorism adviser John Brennan and Janet Napolitano, secretary of homeland security.

Their press conference was brief—under 14 minutes—and there was no serious challenge to the official cover story, even though Brennan began with a description of what US security agencies knew before Abdulmutallab boarded the plane in Amsterdam which begged questioning.

Brennan declared: "In the weeks and months leading up to the Christmas attack, various components of our intelligence community had fragments of information about the strategic threat posed by Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the specific plot of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. It was known that AQAP not only sought to strike US targets in Yemen, as they had when they attacked our embassy in Sana'a in 2008, but that it also sought to strike the US homeland. Indeed, there was a stream of intelligence on this threat. It was known, thanks to the warnings of his father in November, that Abdulmutallab had developed extremist views, and that his father feared that he had joined unidentified extremists."

Brennan went on to say, without offering any explanation, that somehow the vast US intelligence and security apparatus failed to put together the threat from Al Qaeda in Yemen and Abdulmutallab's extremist affiliations and sojourn in that country.

Napolitano was asked about the report in the *Los Angeles Times* that customs officers in Detroit had seen Abdulmutallab's name on the TIDE list—a larger database than the no-fly list—when they were checking the passenger manifest while Northwest Flight 253 was in the air. She confirmed that Customs intended to question him after the plane landed, but offered no explanation on why the plane's crew was not notified so that protective measures could have been taken.

It is not yet possible to provide an answer as to how and why the events of December 25 unfolded as they did. One thing is certain: the official story does not hold water. The Obama administration and the US intelligence agencies are not telling the American people the truth.

One possibility is that Abdulmutallab had been identified as an Al Qaeda sympathizer, but was viewed, especially

given his family connections, as a potential candidate for recruitment as an American agent, on the pattern of the operation that produced last week's disaster for the CIA in Afghanistan. (In that case, the supposed recruit became a suicide bomber and killed seven CIA agents. If the bomb had detonated on board Flight 253, the death toll would have been nearly 300).

There are other possibilities, including an effort from within the intelligence apparatus to destabilize and undermine the Obama administration, or provide a means of pushing it to even more aggressive military actions in the Middle East and Central Asia.

In this context, one must consider the remarkable fact that Obama felt compelled to issue and make public an executive order requiring the US "counterterrorism community" to "enhance the rigor and raise the standard of tradecraft of intelligence analysis, especially analysis designed to uncover and prevent terrorist plots."

It is extraordinary that more than eight years after 9/11, a US president must issue such a directive. But the White House executive summary notes, in a concluding paragraph:

"There was not a comprehensive or functioning process for tracking terrorist threat reporting and actions taken such that departments and agencies are held accountable for running down all leads associated with high visibility and high priority plotting efforts undertaken by al Qa'ida and its allies, in particular against the US Homeland."

The syntax is convoluted and the language vague, but the only serious conclusion that can be drawn is that the entire "war on terror" is bogus. It is a pretext for the intensification of US military aggression abroad and attacks on the democratic rights of the American people at home.

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