

## Flight 253: Intelligence Agencies Nixed State Department Move to Revoke Bomber's Visa

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Rightist [demagogues](#), as they are wont to do, prattle-on how they, and they alone, can “keep America safe”-by shredding the Constitution.

Waging a decades-long psychological war against the American people, corporatist thugs embedded within the National Security State assure us that secrecy, deceit and imperial adventures that steal other peoples' resources are the one true path to national prosperity and universal happiness.

But what happens when those charged with protecting us from attack, actually aid and abet those who would kill us, and then handsomely profit from our slaughter in the process?

During a January 27 [hearing](#) of the House Committee on Homeland Security, Under Secretary of State for Management, Patrick F. Kennedy, testified that the visa of accused bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, wasn't revoked at the specific request of secret state agencies.

Kennedy, a Bushist State Department holdover, was the former Director on National Intelligence for Management and headed the transition team that set up the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in 2005 under former Ambassador to Iraq, John D. Negroponte, a veteran of U.S. covert operations since the Vietnam war.

Given the avalanche of media interest, fueled by Fox News and the editorial pages of The Wall Street Journal, whether or not the suspect should have been read his Miranda rights, the only coverage of the hearings that reported Kennedy's explosive testimony, was a brief article in the [Detroit News](#).

Claiming that “revocation action would've disclosed what they were doing,” Kennedy said that allowing the alleged terrorist to keep his visa would have “helped” federal investigators take down the entire network “rather than simply knocking out one soldier in that effort.”

A “soldier” (indicted criminal) who would have murdered 300 air passengers if the detonator concealed in his underpants hadn't serendipitously failed to explode the device.

As Alex Lantier wrote February 3 on the [World Socialist Web Site](#), the latest in a series of significant revelations “has been buried by the media.” The socialist critic avers: “As of this writing, nearly a week after the hearing, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and Los Angeles Times have published no articles on the subject. Nor have the broadcast or cable media reported on it.”

Lantier charges that “despite-or perhaps more accurately,because of-the fact that this information exposes the official government story of the near-disaster to be a lie” the corporate media is fully complicit in the cover-up.

Weeks after the incident, it is now clear that intelligence agencies did far more than simply “watch” a potential terrorist. That they gave Abdulmutallab a leg up, bypassing airline security systems put in place after 9/11 that would have prevented him from boarding that plane, is also crystal clear.

The question is: was a reckless calculation made that gambled the lives of 300 air passengers for ruthless political purposes? If so, was it designed to destabilize the Obama government, thereby binding it ever-closer to a permanent, unelected, security apparatus that feathers its nest by serving the only constituency that matters-giant energy firms, defense-related corporations and those who finance them?

Is this scenario being played out in Washington where Republican right-wingers like Senators [Susan Collins](#) (ME), Tom Coburn (OK), John McCain (AZ), John Ensign (NV) and Lindsey Graham (SC), but also neocon Democrats such as Joseph Lieberman (ID-CT), demand that the accused be turned over to the military for “special handling,” thereby ratcheting-up pressure for increased domestic repression?

Just as pertinently, is this what White House insider Richard Wolffe meant when he said on MSNBC’s [Countdown with Keith Olbermann](#) January 4 that the “president is leaning very much towards thinking this was a systemic failure by individuals who maybe had an alternative agenda.” (emphasis added)

For weeks now, the Obama administration and the media have played the same broken record: despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, a multitude of security agencies, ranging from the CIA, the FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), a satrapy of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the National Security Agency and the Department of Homeland Security, “failed to connect the dots.”

But as I have documented in previous reports, most [recently](#) on January 22, citing multiple domestic and foreign intelligence warnings, including a walk-in interview at the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria’s capital, by the suspect’s own father, a former top official in the Nigerian government, consular officials and CIA officers passed the warning up the food chain-where it sat.

#### Abdulmutallab on the CIA and NCTC’s Radar

The revelation that various agencies of America’s shadow government made a deliberate decision that allowed Abdulmutallab to board Flight 253 is more extensive than previously disclosed.

[Newsweek](#) revealed February 2 that “a single intelligence community database operated by the CIA, known by the code name ‘Hercules’,” held all the “‘bits and pieces’ of intelligence that White House officials believe could have led U.S. authorities to Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab before last December 25.”

However, even though the agencies had assembled information on the suspect in a single computer system where it was readily accessible to analysts, anonymous “intelligence officials” told journalist Mark Hosenball that “all source” analysts at CIA and NCTC “which

both had access to 'Hercules,' were unable to assemble the intelligence scraps in time to prevent Abdulmutallab from boarding his Christmas Day flight from Amsterdam to Detroit with a bomb hidden in his underpants."

The unnamed officials told Hosenball that the failure to stop the suspect "validates assertions by White House and congressional investigators that the alleged lapses in the handling of intelligence related to Abdulmutallab did not stem from a failure of sometimes turf-conscious spy agencies to share information with each other."

"Instead," Newsweek reports, "they point to the intelligence analysis carried out by the CIA and NCTC."

As I previously reported, citing a January 18 investigation by [The New York Times](#), the National Security Agency "learned from a communications intercept" that a man named "'Umar Farouk'-the first two names of the jetliner suspect, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab-had volunteered for a coming operation." Additional NSA intercepts in December "mentioned the date of Dec. 25, and suggested that they were 'looking for ways to get somebody out' or 'for ways to move people to the West,' one senior administration official said."

Running for cover, an intelligence official told Newsweek: "The volume of any database doesn't matter much. That, by itself, doesn't get you anywhere." An interesting spin, when one considers the multibillion dollar [expansion](#) by NSA, as investigative journalist James Bamford reported last November.

The official continues, "Nor does the mere fact that the NCTC and the CIA have shared access to material. The key is knowing what to look for, how to bring together different bits and scraps of information that-on the surface and in an ocean of data-don't appear to be connected." Conversely, knowing which "bits and scraps" to ignore from a parapolitical perspective, may have played an equally critical role in a presumed analytical "lapse."

"This is hard stuff," the anonymous source pontificates. "It's not a case of punching in a couple of search terms, sitting back, and waiting for enlightenment. Once you know the answer, it seems easy. But in real life, you don't get the answer ahead of time."

Really?

To the contrary, as with the September 11, 2001 hijack team, the Flight 253 affair seems to indicate that the decision to allow Abdulmutallab to board the plane was a political, not a law enforcement decision that led analysts not to "connect" more than a few of the "dots."

As we now know, prior to 9/11, the Pentagon's [Able Danger](#) unit had amassed terabytes of data on al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the United States. According to published reports, the unit had obtained detailed information on ringleader, the drug-addled Mohammed Atta, and other members of the suicide squad. Yet just scant months before the atrocity, the unit was shuttered and the data destroyed.

Corporate media and the 9/11 Commission have advanced two contradictory propositions on Able Danger's demise: the Pentagon unit hadn't gathered intelligence on Atta and claims to contrary were overblown or they illegally obtained information on ordinary Americans and were shut down for inadvertent spying.

However as researcher Paul Thompson revealed in [The Terror Timeline](#), Able Danger had identified Americans, only they were the wrong Americans. According to Thompson, the unit pegged “future National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former Defense Secretary William Perry, and other prominent Americans as potential security risks” over their illicit dealings with foreign governments.

How’s that for an inconvenient truth!

As with earlier warnings of impending terrorist strikes, political efficacy trumped the safety and security of the American people. This is underscored by January 20 testimony by NCTC Director, Bushist embed Michael E. Leiter, before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

[CongressDaily](#) revealed that Leiter told the senators, “I will tell you, that when people come to the country and they are on the watch list, it is because we have generally made the choice that we want them here in the country for some reason or another.”

Journalist Chris Strohm disclosed that intelligence officials “acknowledged the government knowingly allows foreigners whose names are on terrorist watch lists to enter the country in order to track their movement and activities,” a fact now confirmed by Patrick F. Kennedy’s January 27 testimony before the House Committee.

Similar to the Detroit News report on Kennedy’s admission, to date, not a single media outlet picked-up the trail and investigated CongressDaily’s chilling disclosure.

Burying the Evidence, “Moving On”

Corporate media are chock-a-block with reports of efforts by right-wing Republicans and some Democrats to brand the Obama administration as “soft on terrorism.”

As readers are well aware, Antifascist Calling doesn’t carry water for the Obama administration; a government that has rightly been characterized as a slick makeover of the previous regime. However it must be acknowledged, unlike Bushist torture freaks, in Abdulmutallab’s case constitutional norms were followed and a criminal suspect lawfully charged for an egregious act.

In “new normal” America however, not disappearing a suspect into a gulag, subject to tender ministrations by “enhanced interrogation” specialists (torturers) is viewed as a bad thing in our debased political culture.

Meanwhile media stenographers scrupulously ignore, with a single-mindedness one has come to expect from totalitarian regimes, considerable evidence that elements of the intelligence-security apparatus could be charged as accessories before and after the fact with Abdulmutallab’s alleged offense.

In his prepared [statement](#) to the House Committee, Kennedy asserted that “following his father’s November 19 visit to the Embassy, we sent a cable to the Washington intelligence and law enforcement community through proper channels (the Visas Viper system) that ‘Information at post suggests [that Farouk] may be involved in Yemeni-based extremists.’ At the same time, the Consular Section entered Abdulmutallab into the Consular Lookout and Support System database known as CLASS.”

When it was discovered that officials in Abuja had misspelled the suspect's name "information about previous visas issued to him and the fact that he currently held a valid U.S. visa was not included in the cable."

Despite the misspelling however, "the CLASS entry resulted in a lookout using the correct spelling that was shared automatically with the primary lookout system used by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and accessible to other agencies."

In other words, even though the initial Embassy cable misspelled Abdulmutallab's name, the "lookout" notification sent out to intelligence agencies, specifically DHS, should have warranted further action. And it also appears that initially it did.

As both the [Los Angeles Times](#) and [CongressDaily](#) reported, Customs and Border Protection agents obtained the suspect's name from the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment or TIDE database, maintained by the NCTC and planned to question Abdulmutallab when Flight 253 landed in Detroit on arrival from Amsterdam.

However, as CongressDaily subsequently revealed, CBP agents "had information about alleged terrorist Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab three days before his departure" and not during the flight as the Los Angeles Times report initially suggested.

As we now know, information fed to NCTC's database contained specific warnings from the State Department—as did the CIA's "Hercules" system as Newsweek reported, and "that White House officials believe could have led U.S. authorities to Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab before last December 25," according to the newsmagazine's anonymous sources.

Why did the State Department fail to revoke the accused terrorist's visa?

When questioned by Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-MS), Kennedy told the panel, "We will revoke the visa of any individual who is a threat to the United States, but we do take one preliminary step."

Kennedy explained, "We ask our law enforcement and intelligence community partners, 'Do you have eyes on this person and do you want us to let this person proceed under your surveillance so that you may potentially break a larger plot?'"

The Undersecretary added: "And one of the members [of the intelligence community]—and we'd be glad to give you that [information] ... in private [closed session]—said, 'Please, do not revoke this visa. We have eyes on this person. We are following this person who has the visa for the purpose of trying to roll up an entire network, not just stop one person.'"

In other words, despite multiple sourced reports from American and overseas security agencies that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was planning to launch an attack, probably on Christmas Day, deploying an asset identified by NSA intercepts as a "Nigerian" named "Umar Farouk," high-level intelligence officials, claiming to have "eyes" on the alleged AQAP operative, a suspected suicide bomber to boot, allowed him to board an airliner packed with nearly 300 passengers and crew.

In a prepared [statement](#) to the Committee, NCTC Director Leiter said, "Let's start with this clear assertion: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab should not have stepped on that plane. The counterterrorism system failed and we told the President we are determined to do better."

However, neither House Committee members, nor the corporate media which suppressed the story entirely, challenged Leiter's statement of a week earlier when he testified before a Senate panel that intelligence agencies allow watch listed terrorists to enter the country "because we have generally made the choice that we want them here in the country for some reason or another."

If Leiter's testimony was taken under oath, he should be brought up on charges of perjury since he next asserted that "Intelligence Community analysts who were working hard on immediate threats to Americans in Yemen did not understand the fragments of intelligence on what turned out later to be Mr. Abdulmutallab, so they did not push him onto the terrorist watchlist."

This claim, as with practically all the "facts" released to the American people by the White House, Congress or by the secret state agencies themselves, is a rank mendacity.

As Newsweek's unnamed sources claim, CIA and NCTC analysts did have access to an "intelligence community database," "Hercules," and that it held all the available data on Abdulmutallab and "validates assertions by the White House and congressional investigators" that the failure to stop the bomber were not due to bungled efforts "to connect the dots."

As I reported last month, during a December 22 meeting at the White House, President Obama was briefed by top officials from the CIA, FBI, and Department of Homeland Security "who ticked off a list of possible plots against the United States and how their agencies were working to disrupt them," as The New York Times disclosed January 18.

Last month, [Newsweek](#) reported that "intelligence analysts had 'highlighted' an evolving 'strategic threat'," and that "'some of the improvised explosive device tactics AQAP might use against U.S. interests were highlighted' in other 'finished intelligence products'."

"Finished intelligence products" on an evolving plot to destroy an airliner are hardly "fragments," as Leiter deceitfully testified to the House Committee. Cheekily, NCTC's head honcho falsely claimed that his agency, the recipient of billions of dollars in taxpayer largesse, "did not correlate the specific information that would have been required to help keep Abdulmutallab off that Northwest Airlines flight."

Citing the need to "improve" intelligence capabilities by accelerating "information technology enhancements, to include knowledge discovery, database integration, cross-database searches, and the ability to correlate biographic information with terrorism-related intelligence," Leiter implies that billions more in handouts to security contractors are needed to "solve" the problem.

This from the Director of an agency that under his watch wasted more than \$500 million on its flawed Railhead project to "upgrade" the TIDE database, an initiative "crippled by technical failures and contractor mismanagement," as the Project on Government Oversight ([POGO](#)) and [congressional investigators](#) revealed back in 2008.

Contractor hanky-panky aside, the problem is not one of technical "upgrades" to an agency that seems more concerned with facilitating the entrance of terrorists into the country "for some reason or another" than stopping them.

Rather, it is imperative that the American people demand that Congress and the Executive

Branch, which in theory, controls the gaggle of alphabet-soup satrapies in cahoots with the most rotten and predatory sectors of the U.S. ruling class, clean house and bring to book, the rightist elements aligned with the petroleum-intelligence nexus who continue to deploy terror gangs such as al-Qaeda as strategic assets.

That they do so regardless of the cost, to the American people and to the victims of illegal U.S. wars and occupations, is a sign that the system, verging on bankruptcy will soon veer even further out of any effective democratic control.

How else can one interpret Director of National Intelligence, Dennis C. Blair's chilling assertion to the Senate Committee on Intelligence that he was "highly certain" that al-Qaeda "or one of its affiliates" will attempt a large-scale attack on American soil within the next six months," as [The New York Times](#) reported.

"We judge that al Qaeda maintains its intent to attack the homeland, preferably with a large-scale operation that would cause mass casualties, harm the U.S. economy or both," Blair wrote in his annual [threat assessment](#) to the Senate Intelligence Committee.

As investigative journalist Russ Baker wrote in his essential book, [Family of Secrets](#), "Authoritarianism thrives in a climate of fear, and the [Bush] administration invoked fear continually. But when it came to security, there was the usual exemption for large corporate entities [and] the tattoo of terror was relentless, especially during the political high season."

Not much has changed since Barack Obama became president. Many of the same dodgy players who ramped-up production lines at the fear factory for the Bush/Cheney team are still in place, doing what they do best: hitting the corporate "sweet spot" for their clients in the Military-Industrial-Security-Complex.

In the weeks since the attempted destruction of Flight 253, one thing is certain: the White House, Congress, the intelligence agencies and their handmaidens, the corporate media, are participating in a massive cover-up.

And as we enter the "political high season," what might come next is anyone's guess.

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