

The Christmas Day Terror Attack: Failed Bombings Bring Inconvenience

By [Scott Taylor](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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When I first heard the sensationalized news reports of the Christmas Day terror attack against the Detroit airport, I felt I must be missing something.

The panic and fear generated by those early reports manifested itself in ramped-up security and massive delays at all North American airports.

The fact that the apprehended suspect — Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab — was a member of al-Qaida's Nigerian franchise, and that he chose Christmas Day to launch his attack was, in the opinion of Fox News analysts, enough to proclaim that the Christian world was under full assault.

Last week, it was announced that one of the charges laid against Abdulmutallab was "possession of a weapon of mass destruction."

President Barack Obama was so alarmed by this security breach that he ordered his intelligence agencies to conduct a full review of their procedures.

In the immediate aftermath of Abdulmutallab's one-man blitzkrieg, no airline passengers travelling to the United States were allowed any carry-on luggage, reading material was forbidden on flights and there is to be no access to the aisles or washrooms for a full hour prior to landing.

The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority took advantage of this climate of fear to inform the flying public that starting next month, the so-called "nude scanner" will be implemented at all major airports.

Because that is a heck of a lot of amenity and convenience — not to mention privacy — being taken from travellers in a short span of time, I think perhaps a little cause-and-effect assessment is in order.

While only a few people are still discussing the details of the incident, what appears to have transpired is that Abdulmutallab had stored a few ounces of a liquid chemical inside his underpants.

As Northwest Airlines Flight 253, en route from Amsterdam, began its descent into the Detroit airport, the Nigerian extremist ignited his "bomb."

Obviously, the device did not explode, but it did apparently cause burns to Abdulmutallab's

legs, and to the hands and arms of those passengers who quickly overpowered him.

One cannot help but compare this latest incident with the Dec. 22, 2001, shoe bomber attack, which briefly paralyzed air travel around the world eight years ago.

With the U.S. still reeling from the 9-11 attacks and the anthrax scare only three months earlier, Richard Colvin Reid's antics caused an incredibly disproportionate panic among the masses.

A luckless, petty crook, Reid may have been an imaginative nut job, but he was no bomb maker.

Halfway through an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami, a stewardess witnessed Reid trying to ignite his shoe. Other crew members and passengers overpowered the six-foot-four Reid, and a small amount of plastic explosive was found in the heels of his shoes.

Without a detonator, this substance would have simply burned fiercely but would not detonate or explode. Reid did not possess a working bomb, but nevertheless he pleaded guilty to "possessing a weapon of mass destruction."

His legacy, of course, has been the enforced shoe removal and scanning at all U.S. airports. (Canada quietly stopped this being a mandatory requirement several years ago).

What we need to keep in mind is that terror as a weapon can only truly be measured by the response it generates.

Neither the underpants bomber nor the shoe bomber succeeded in seriously harming anyone, yet by virtue of the fear that they invoked, they will effectively cause both inconvenience and grief for millions of airline passengers for years to come.

At the height of the German Blitz in the Second World War, the residents of Britain did not allow the nightly air raids to break their spirit.

They showed their collective defiance by carrying on with their normal routine.

When I was in Belgrade, Serbia, during the NATO air bombardment in 1999, I witnessed the Serbs putting on target T-shirts and flocking to the bridges each night to present themselves as human shields. That's collective defiance.

As a frequent flier, I must confess that I fear that the next would-be attacker hides their bomb internally. Such a weapon of mass destruction would surely result in mandatory cavity searches, which would be terrifying.

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