

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2741

December 26, 2009

## Detroit Terror Plot Makes 28 Plots Foiled Since 9/11

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On December 25, a Nigerian student attempted to ignite a mixture of powder and liquid on a Northwest Airlines flight landing in Detroit, Michigan. Passengers helped to stop the suspect from carrying out his plot after the device failed to fully detonate, marking the 28th foiled terror plot against the United States since 9/11.

This aborted attack provides a visceral reminder that terrorists remain committed to killing Americans. But it also illustrates the need to:

- Work with international partners on countering terrorism;
- Defend the domestic intelligence and law enforcement tools that disrupt plots inside the U.S.; and
- Pursue foreign terrorist sanctuaries that serve as staging grounds for international operations.

Clearly, terrorists have not wavered in their resolve to strike America. The United States must be equally resolute in its response.

**December 25, 2009.** The individual involved in the plot, believed by media accounts to be Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, was a 23-year-old engineering student living in London. He had boarded a plane from Nigeria to Amsterdam and was flying from Amsterdam to the U.S. when he attempted to detonate a device as the plane began to land. The device failed to detonate, and passengers moved quickly to stop Abdulmutallab from trying again, leading to his arrest by U.S. authorities.

Media accounts following the plot indicate that Abdulmutallab is believed to be involved with al-Qaeda.

**28 Plots Foiled.** Abdulmutallab's failed attack is the 28th terror plot foiled since 9/11. Several factors have contributed to this success. Sheer luck has played a role in some of these thwarted attacks, while in other instances, Americans have helped stop attacks by putting their own lives at risk.

Furthermore, U.S. efforts in the war on terrorism, including operations in Afghanistan, have helped to weed out terrorist sanctuaries before they can organize attacks. Finally, domestic counterterrorism tools put in place since 9/11 have helped stop terrorists from operating on U.S. soil. Continuing this success will require the U.S. to be diligent in these efforts. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Support Counterterrorism Tools.** Tools such as the PATRIOT Act, which modernizes intelligence and legal authorities for the war on terrorism, and the Terrorist Watch List have helped to stop attacks similar to the foiled Christmas Day plot in Detroit. Congress and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should support continuance of these authorities.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2741.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2741.cfm)

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison  
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
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aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

- *Work with America's International Partners.* Yesterday's plot was as much about the U.S. as it was other international partners. Abdulmutallab lived in London, where U.K. authorities are helping to investigate. His flight had departed from Amsterdam with passengers coming from Nigeria. And if found to be a member of al-Qaeda, Abdulmutallab would be directly connected to an international terrorist network.

The global ramifications of this plot demonstrate the need for the U.S. to work closely with its international partners on terrorism. Through such programs as DHS assistance programs, which helps other countries improve their security practices, and the Visa Waiver Program, which encourages information sharing among member countries, DHS and Congress can support international security cooperation.

- *Continue Efforts to Deny Overseas Sanctuaries.* Abdulmutallab's likely association with al-Qaeda demonstrates that this organization, along with

other international terrorist groups, continues to operate worldwide.

It is vital that the U.S. work in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia to stop these terrorist organizations from staging operations overseas. Often these groups take sanctuary in countries that do not have the resources and/or political will to oppose them, which makes the need for U.S. overseas anti-terrorism operations all the more important.

**Relentless Foes.** Yesterday's failed attack will not be the last terrorist plot against the United States. Continuing to organize and mobilize against these individuals, both inside the U.S. and in conjunction with America's international partners, is the best way to stop attacks in the future.

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