
Intelligence Community to Congress: ...

Contributed by Administrator

by Steven Emerson

... Failed Christmas Day Bombing a 'Systematic Failure'. This week, both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate ...

... convened panels to continue their respective reviews of the failed Christmas day airline bombing attack in Detroit. The discussion and the findings echoed last week's Senate hearing - the near success of the attack represented a systematic failure to analyze, connect, and act upon gathered intelligence.

In both hearings, witnesses seemed reluctant to speak in detail, but did acknowledge no one has been disciplined as a result of the missed connections that allowed Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to board the flight from Amsterdam despite a series of red flags.

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs invited Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton, who led the 9/11 Commission. Before critiquing the government's preparedness for the Christmas Day bomb plot, they began by identifying the enemy. As they explained in their prepared remarks:

"The threat from al Qaida and radical Islam remains strong...Al Qaida's core is still active, individuals are still being radicalized in Western countries and motivated to commit violence, and homegrown lone actors are still a risk."

Having set the stage, Hamilton and Kean explained that the federal government must move forward on both tactical and analytical improvements to the U.S. counterterrorism strategy.

While the failed attack served as a reminder for why the government first established the Director of National Intelligence and the National Counter Terrorism Center, it was also a warning that more must be done with the collected intelligence. As they explained:

"the greatest single challenge that arises from this incident in our view is the urgent need to strengthen the analytic process."

Part of acting upon that intelligence, as the men detailed, will be continuing to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries. While the U.S. is currently focused on the threat posed by Yemen, al Qaida and their ilk are also increasing their presence in Pakistan, Algeria, the Sahel, and Somalia.

Wednesday's hearing in front of the House Committee on Homeland Security provided some fresh perspective on the attack and the efforts to combat future attacks. Although Michael E. Leiter mostly reiterated his testimony from last week's Senate hearing, members of the House also heard from the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department, each who provided unique insight into the failures that must be cured.

Deputy Homeland Security Secretary Jane Holl Lute identified a number of areas where the agency is working to ensure that similar attacks are unsuccessful including: (i) the deployment of new technology for identifying rudimentary explosives; (ii) bolstering aviation law enforcement; and (iii) increasing cooperation with international partners; and (iv) re-evaluating the criteria and processes used to create watchlists, a goal that requires the cooperation of among others, the State Department.

Discussing the types of travel restrictions that Lute alluded to, Under Secretary for Management Patrick F. Kennedy provided insight into the State Department's efforts. As Kennedy explained, since 9/11, the State Department has:

"developed and implemented intensive screening processes requiring personal interviews, employing analytic interview techniques, incorporating multiple biometric checks, all built around a sophisticated global information technology network."

Despite these efforts, Kennedy recognized that more must be done. Consequently, State is continuing to work on reviewing visa issuance and revocation criteria.

As Ms. Lute explained, despite the continuing threat posed by groups like al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, DHS and its partners remain "determined to thwart those plans and disrupt, dismantle, and defeat terrorist networks by employing multiple layers of defense that work in concert with one another to secure our country."

These hearings provided an opportunity to take a step back and review our nation's security apparatus—to determine what is and is not working. Hopefully law enforcement and the intelligence community will make the appropriate changes to prevent future attacks.

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