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## Body Scanning: Xmas Day's legacy

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# Tidings of Comfort & Joy: for vendors, but not for Nigerians

by Philip Baum

Should be subjected to enhanced screening! Why? Because I am a British passport holder. And why should we focus on British passport holders? Because Richard Reid, also known as the shoe bomber, was a British passport holder, so surely it follows that if somebody tries to blow up an American airliner operating a trans-Atlantic route from Europe, we should target his fellow nationals?

Following a similar line of logic, given that Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was a Nigerian passport holder, the American authorities would have us believe that we should tarnish all Nigerians with the same brush and identify them, on the grounds of nationality alone, as posing a greater threat to our flights.

Of course, in reality, there was no way that, in the aftermath of the shoe bomber incident, anybody was going to suggest that British passengers were worthy of greater inspection than others. The political repercussions would have been seismic and the Thatcher-Reagan 'special relationship' that had, to a certain extent, survived subsequent changes in administrations both sides of the Atlantic, would have been dead and buried. Let alone the fact that it would have been a measure devoid of a modicum of common sense.

Nigeria, however, is a different story. Aside from a few heartfelt condemnations vocally expressed to the world's media in Abuja, there was little that the Nigerian government could do to combat the 2010 naming and shaming of their nation by the American administration. The resentment caused amongst the Nigerian general public, however, is not something that should be dismissed as toothless whingeing. The branding of certain nationalities as being more 'dangerous' can further exacerbate anti-American sentiment, especially amongst those individuals who are borderline radicals, adding fuel and motive to the al Qaeda cause.

If we want to counter the threat of

Islamic fundamentalism, demonising certain states, where there is a high percentage of followers of Islam is hardly a step in the right direction. After all, it only takes one person to carry out a terrorist atrocity and there may well be as many radicalised Muslims in the United Kingdom as there are in Nigeria.

To combat terrorism, we need to foster our rapport with states and encourage cooperation. Let us not forget that Abdulmutallab's own father, Dr Alhaji Umaru Mutallab, was sufficiently concerned about his son's behaviour that

**"...focussing on Nigerians, Pakistanis and Yemenite passengers, or those from the other 11 so-called 'suspicious' countries, and we make it easier for terrorists bearing other passports to beat the system..."**

he alerted the American authorities. The elder Mutallab was the former Chairman of Nigeria's oldest and largest bank, First Bank of Nigeria plc, and is currently Chairman of Nigeria's first Islamic bank, Jaiz Bank International Plc. Here was a Nigerian citizen that did what few people in the world would be prepared to do; how many of us would ever report our own offspring to our own national security agencies, let alone those of the United States. This man deserves international acclamation for an act of selfless heroism. In fact, in the whole sorry story of the Christmas Day plot, the only person who took any action to prevent the incident happening before

Northwest flight NW253 departed Amsterdam for Detroit was a Nigerian.

We do need to differentiate between the various types of passengers boarding our flights, but to do so on grounds of nationality is not only unfair and unwarranted, it will also encourage racial profiling by screeners on grounds of race, religion and skin colour. Additionally it is a measure comparable with adding prohibited items to the Prohibited Items Lists – that's what screeners start to look for, possibly overlooking other threats in the process. Start focussing on Nigerians, Pakistanis and Yemenite passengers, or those from the other 11 so-called 'suspicious' countries, and we make it easier for terrorists bearing other passports to beat the system.

As a response to the events of Christmas Day 2009, regulators and airports on both sides of the Atlantic set about the procurement of body scanners; it took only a matter of days for certain manufacturers' order books to fill to capacity. Granted the fact that, five years ago, one of the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission was to improve "the ability of screening checkpoints to detect explosives on passengers", it begs the question as to why this never became a reality then and why it took Abdulmutallab's attempt to ensure that it did?

It is a common allegation that the aviation security industry is reactive, only rolling out new measures and new technologies in the aftermath of an attack or the revelation of a specific plot; it is a subject I have written about on many occasions. I am, however, aghast at the actions of certain regulators attempts to simply patch the hole demonstrated by the last attempt, without looking to the future and failing to address the numerous other loopholes that exist, many of which were also demonstrated on 25th December 2009. Isn't the real lesson of Christmas Day: next time it will be different?

Security professionals have long been troubled about the potential for terrorists to infiltrate explosives onto aircraft on their person, yet that is not the only area about which concern has been expressed. The media is all abuzz with speculation about the mass rollout of body scanners and I, for one, welcome their deployment, providing that we don't create longer lines to get through security and we make intelligent decisions as to who should be screened by what technology. Yet we must accept the fact that, reliance solely on millimetre wave imaging solutions, may just be huge expenditure with limited return; after all, it's highly questionable as to whether Abdulmutallab's device would have been identified using backscatter X-ray, with its better imaging quality, let alone millimetre wave solutions.

**“...find a way for the screeners to be provided with information pertaining to the passenger...”**

The ideal checkpoint is one that encompasses a broad range of scanners, rather than buying-in to any one technology. Furthermore, there is no need to advertise which equipment passengers are to be scanned with. How many passengers arriving at certain UK airports realise that they are being scanned by passive millimetre wave technology as they walk through the Customs hall? Why do we need the manufacturer's name and the equipment's model number emblazoned on the side of the system? With most vendors having snazzy websites, containing product specifications and capabilities, the only purpose the marking serves is to provide the would-be terrorist with valuable information as to how the technology might be circumvented.

The number one change that needs to be brought into effect at the checkpoint is to find a way for the screeners to be provided with information pertaining to the passenger or, at least having a mechanism in place for check-in agents privy to certain data to flag a passenger for enhanced screening. Abdulmutallab

should have been identified for search long before he arrived at the check-in desk in Lagos or transfer desk in Amsterdam. There were abundant causes for alarm, regardless as to his appearance and behaviour: ticket paid in cash (even though that is a regular mode of payment in West Africa, his ticket cost over \$2800); ticket bought in Ghana for a journey starting in Nigeria; ticket altered (his ticket was originally issued to return to Accra, but later changed to Lagos); visa issued in the United Kingdom without having the UK on the travel itinerary; travelling without luggage for a two-week trip. Add to this the prior intelligence that existed but was not transmitted to those who needed to know.

There are many questions that still need to be answered. At the time of writing, it is pure speculation as to why Abdulmutallab tried to detonate his bomb as the Northwest flight was descending, at just above 7000 feet, on approach to Detroit when one would have expected him to have acted whilst the aircraft was at cruising altitude and earlier in the flight. We need to know why he changed his ticket from the planned return to Accra to returning to Lagos, especially when he wasn't planning on returning at all. Why did he elect to fly via Amsterdam when Delta Airlines operate direct flights from Lagos to Atlanta? Why did he travel via Lagos when he could have flown to Europe and the USA from Ghana? Why did the device fail? Had it detonated, would it have caused the destruction of the aircraft? Why, with a pseudo-profiling system in place for US carriers, was he not identified as a possible threat when spoken to in Amsterdam? To what extent did a Christmas Day atmosphere of "goodwill to all men" play a role in the industry's failure to identify Abdulmutallab? And, we need to carefully analyse reports regarding his behaviour before and during the flights. The answers may shape future policy and procedures.

The two positives that have come out of the Abdulmutallab incident is that firstly we will see new body scanners at checkpoints and secondly, there is, at long last, a sense that the authorities are beginning to consider profiling as a tool to be embraced. It's not going to be easy, given the subjective nature of the

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process and the various interpretations of what profiling actually means. However, the industry and the general public can see that common sense is required, so we must convince the regulators and other powers-that-be of the fact that profiling is nothing more than risk management, the very essence of quality security, and their inability to measure its effectiveness should not be a barrier to its deployment.

To be fair, the Christmas Day incident demonstrated that profiling alone is not the solution. Abdulmutallab was, in Amsterdam at least, profiled...and profiled incorrectly. Equally, our search techniques failed; in Lagos, on the basis of CCTV footage, Abdulmutallab went through full security checks, removing his belt and shoes as he was screened. And, most fundamentally, it was an intelligence failure on the part of the American authorities.

Anyway, I'm off now to lobby my Member of Parliament to ensure that all Americans are given extra special screening before they are allowed into the United Kingdom. After all, one of those believed to have played a key role in effecting surveillance and gathering intelligence for Lashkar-e-Taibar in advance of the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai was an American passport holder, David Coleman Headley. My guess is I'll fail in my attempt to focus on Americans as a result...and rightly so. ■