

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2503

February 4, 2010

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

During my tenure on the Senate Intelligence Committee, I have worked with the Executive Branch to stem the disclosure of sensitive information. In 2006, for example, I introduced legislation that would aid the Executive Branch in prosecuting individuals engaged in leaks of classified information. In the realm of national security, sometimes it is necessary to withhold critical information from the public that may be used by our enemies to harm the American people.

Accordingly, I am deeply disturbed with the official handling of vital national security information regarding the recent cooperation by the Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab. On Monday afternoon, the leadership of the Senate Intelligence Committee received notification from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) concerning Abdulmutallab's recent willingness to provide critical information. FBI officials stressed the importance of not disclosing the fact of his cooperation in order to protect on-going and follow-on operations to neutralize additional threats to the American public; FBI Director Bob Muller personally stressed to me that keeping the fact of his cooperation quiet was vital to preventing future attacks against the United States. Handling this information in such a sensitive manner struck me as entirely appropriate.

Twenty-four hours later, however, White House staff assembled members of the media to announce Abdulmutallab's cooperation and to laud the events that led to his decision to cooperate with law enforcement personnel. This information immediately hit the air waves globally and, no doubt, reached the ears of our enemies abroad.

At the Senate Intelligence Committee's Annual World Wide Threats Hearing Tuesday, the Director of National Intelligence, the FBI Director, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency all stated they believe terrorists will attempt another attack on America within the next few months. I cannot understand, Mr. President, why the sudden cooperation by Abdulmutallab would be broadcast publicly to the media in detail when your intelligence chiefs are unanimously warning that another attack on our country is imminent. The release of this sensitive information has no doubt been helpful to his terrorist cohorts around the world.

It is deeply disturbing to me that the Intelligence Committee would be advised of sensitive information, and told of the vital imperative to keep such information secret for the sake of national security, only to see this information – less than twenty-four hours later – broadcast to the world from the White House. This distortion of the congressional notification process suggests that other considerations are taking precedence over keeping timely and sensitive information away from our enemies.

Some have tried to use Abdulmutallab's sudden cooperation as a justification for prosecuting this foreign terrorist in an Article III court, but I believe this development supports an opposing view. Because we treated him in this fashion, we followed Miranda and advised him of his right to remain silent, losing five crucial weeks for obtaining imminent threat information. Miranda is issued when statements from the accused are needed to obtain a conviction, but in this case we did not need his own statements as the chemical evidence he was wearing and over 200 witnesses would ably suffice; hence, the decision to Mirandize made no sense on a practical or strategic level. Additionally, Abdulmutallab's family was key in gaining his cooperation, and in most cases the suicide bomber does not have a moderate Islamic family willing to work with the United States; in fact, the opposite is most often the case (as with the suicide bomber that killed seven CIA officers in Khost, whose wife applauded her husband's actions).

I urge you, Mr. President, to consider the consequences of publicly disseminating sensitive information vital to the defense of the American people. I do not believe the American people want this information jeopardized to further political arguments. The American people rightfully expect the government's first priority to be their security. It is also critical that our courageous law enforcement and intelligence professionals know that they can trust that sensitive information vital to their efforts to protect the American people will not be disclosed.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Bond
United States Senator