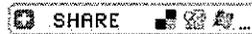




Opinion

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Examiner Editorial: It's time for an outside panel on terrorism

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In response to the nearly successful Christmas Day bombing of a commercial airliner approaching Detroit from Amsterdam, Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., asked President Barack Obama to convene a group of outside experts, aka "Team B," to conduct an independent assessment of the government's counterterrorism policies and to recommend new strategies for coping with evolving terrorist threats. A similar panel, assembled by then-CIA Director George H.W. Bush, was critical of the Nixon/Kissinger detente strategy and prompted President Ronald Reagan's tougher stance toward the Soviet Union that led to the end of the Cold War.

The need for a Team B on terrorism should be clear. The federal government's vast intelligence and homeland security apparatus failed to keep 23-year-old Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab off Northwest Airlines Flight 253 despite clear evidence that he was a potential terrorist. These systemic failures compound the flaws in the administration's decision to treat terrorism as isolated criminal activities, not acts of war.

Thus, instead of military interrogation, the president's chief counterterrorism adviser conceded recently that Abdulmutallab was charged with a crime, got "lawyered up" and so far has rejected a plea agreement to persuade him to talk to federal prosecutors. The longer he remains silent, the less valuable his information becomes — and it may already be worthless.

Wolf warned Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder in October that Yemen had become a major al-Qaida stronghold, and he urged Holder not to release Guantanamo detainees to return to that country. That same month, the National Security Agency intercepted a discussion originating from Yemen that included a reference to a Nigerian being trained for a special mission. Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan also was reportedly in contact with the same Islamic cleric who helped radicalize Abdulmutallab.

Despite Wolf's warning, Obama and Holder sent seven Gitmo detainees back to Yemen, a country so unstable that in recent weeks the U.S. and Britain temporarily closed their embassies due to a "live threat" from al-Qaida.

Because there are more Abdulmutallabs lurking out there, Wolf's suggestion is not only sensible but also urgent. "What the president needs to look at and understand, and take responsibility for, is the fact

that increasingly, jihadists around the world perceive that it is not only possible but productive for them to engage in the violent kind of attacks within the United States," said Frank Gaffney, former deputy secretary of defense under Reagan who now heads the Center for Security Policy.

A Team B would be helpful in uncovering flaws in the administration's current policies that encourage the murderous schemes of America's enemies.

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