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Where lawmakers come to blog

The Big Question: What can Obama say to restore confidence?

By Sydelle Moore - 01/07/10 09:04 AM ET

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Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer some insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Today's question:

After releasing today's report on the failure of U.S. intelligence to prevent the Christmas Day bombing attempt, what could President Barack Obama say to the American people to bolster confidence in the country's anti-terrorism efforts?

Hal Lewis, professor of Physics at UC Santa Barbara, said:

I don't know of anything in Obama's history, education, or experience that indicates that he knows anything at all about either national security or intelligence. So there is nothing he could say to the American people that would be credible. If he could find someone in his kingdom who does know something, that might be reassuring, but it is a telling fact that I can't think of such a person.

Jim Harper, director of Information Policy Studies for The Cato Institute, said:

When we overreact to terrorism, we hurt ourselves. Using the bully pulpit, President Obama should guide the country away from overreaction and back toward our natural sense of indomitability.

This is largely a communications problem, but specific assurances about the quality of our country's anti-terrorism efforts probably won't create needed confidence. Instead, confidence will come from reminding people that our country and people are strong and resilient; that the government's anti-terrorism skills improve with every attempt; and that the United States will not be knocked off course by small, weak bands of radicals who, by all authoritative accounts, are on the run and unpopular even in the countries they infest.



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The shrill political rhetoric around terrorism keeps Americans agitated and prone to overreaction. Worse, it encourages would-be terrorists by signaling that attacking the United States can knock us off our game. It's embarrassing to observe the glee with which some advocates have used the recent attempt to seek political advantage for the party out of power; to renew the call for an undefined "war" on terror; and even to argue for changing our legal regime. Stoking fear is a strategic mistake, harmful to the country, and unnecessary.

Overreaction helps terrorism do its work. "No Drama" Obama should do his.

John F. McManus, president of The John Birch Society, said:

The president could say that those responsible for the failure have been fired and that there will be no further tolerance of additional failures to act on already acquired information. He could then indicate that the politically correct nonsense that refuses to place extra attention on some persons has been abandoned. And, while he's at it, he could announce the start of significant moves to wind down military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that are viewed by many in those and neighboring nations as unwanted occupations designed to impose America's will. Because the way to prevent terrorist attacks is to squelch them before they are carried out, it would also be most welcome if he told Americans that he will urge Congress to reinstitute the former House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Senate Subcommittee on International Subversion.

Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist, said:

This is the responsibility of the press, to inform the public that we now have a White House that's serious about supporting anti-terrorism efforts, not just going through the motions. The people on the front lines need the real support of the White House, and now they have it.

Peter Navarro, professor of Economics and Public Policy at U.C. Irvine, said:

Obama has two communication problems that make this problematic: He has lost credibility on several other issues, particularly the economy, that he is no longer believable. He is way over-exposed in the media so any new appearance has less communicative value. End result: America is turned off and tuning him out.

Justin Raimondo, editorial director of Antiwar.com, said:

White House national security adviser James Jones says: "We know what happened, we know what didn't happen, and we know how to fix it." Hearing this, most Americans will roll their eyes heaven-ward, and exclaim: "Yeah, suuuure you do!" They'll hear Dianne Feinstein proclaim that the "no fly" list ought to include anybody about whom there is a "reasonable doubt," and vow not to fly unless they absolutely positively HAVE to, thus dealing another blow to an airline industry already crippled by the recession and fear of flying.

In short, there isn't anything President Obama can say to reassure the American people, because the horse is already out of the barn. There is, in reality, nothing he can say, or do, that will restore the confidence of the American people in their government, because when push came to shove it was the passengers who saved themselves from the panty-bomber — not the CIA, not the National Security Council, not any one of the five or six "intelligence" bureaucracies that suck up our tax dollars and do little to earn their keep.

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George W. Bush's response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was to declare war on virtually the entire Middle East. Obama is continuing that policy, and even expanding it. The ranks of the terrorists are swelling on account of this crazy policy, at almost the same rate that the Treasury is being drained because of it. The problem isn't security — because there is no security for an imperial power that claims the "right" to rampage throughout the world. As long as we insist on occupying Afghanistan, Iraq, parts of Pakistan, Yemen, and wherever else we imagine our "national interests" are threatened, we will face the wrath of the occupied. It's as simple as that.

Comments (9)

Why does this site even bother to interview Craig Newmark? His comments never address the issue and can always be summarized as: "Obama is great, everyone should love Obama." He says the same thing every single time, regardless of the question asked. The latest screw-up that almost led to the death of 200 people? Why, that is just evidence of Obama's greatness. The responsibility of the press is to report the news, Craig, not increase confidence in the administration. Sorry Craig, but what happened on Christmas was a complete botch job by this administration, and irrelevantly alluding to the last administration for no reason doesn't change that.

BY **OBAMA IS CARTER** on 01/07/2010 at 12:24

What can he say?How about - Effective immediately I am resigning my office os POTUS. That will work for me.

BY **BOB** on 01/07/2010 at 12:36

I think Obama could say we know what went wrong and BE HONEST about it.. Then tell me how they plan to get the intel people on the same page— some new computer program for inputting info that everyone looks at strikes me as an obvious need— but I'll wait to see what he says.

BY **ASHLEY** on 01/07/2010 at 12:41

two words." I RESIGN"

BY **JAKE2** on 01/07/2010 at 12:52

One suggestion would be to stop lying?

BY **FRAN** on 01/07/2010 at 13:21

I have ordered the immediate withdrawal of all forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and will focus all available resources on protecting our citizens from domestic terrorism, including threats from radical right wing extremists, to include hiring additional personnel to protect airports, sea ports, borders and military bases. All additional security resources will be paid for by a security assessment against foreign imports.

BY **DOOLINDALTON** on 01/07/2010 at 13:29

The International Man Will Never Fly Society, whose motto is "Birds Fly, Men Drink", is accepting new members. But you have to promise: Given a choice I will never fly, given no choice I will never fly sober.This whole thing is as stupid as the aforementioned society. Trusting the government to protect you under BHO is a big mistake. He needs to go so we can get a real president.

BY **JIMMY KNUCKLES** on 01/07/2010 at 13:33

Obama says a lot of things, as the Speaker recently pointed out. People have lost confidence in what Obama says.

BY **AVERY** on 01/07/2010 at 13:53

It should be readily apparent to anyone with an IQ of 90 that Obama, the savior not only of America but of the entire world, is at least as big a liar as Bush, and a Hell of a lot bigger FRAUD. To paraphrase Marion Berry about Jesse Jackson, "Obama has never run anything but his mouth."

BY **INDEPENDENT VOTER** on 01/07/2010 at 14:31

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