

# New al-Qaeda 'body bombs' that can beat airport security are alarming terror experts

International anti-terrorist officials are alarmed that al-Qaeda is trying new "body bomb" devices that would enable suicide bombers to breach airline security measures.

By Leonard Doyle in Washington

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Abdullah al-Asiri offered to give himself up to Prince Mohammed Bin NayePhoto:

Reuters

Anti-terrorism experts held an emergency meeting last month after an al-Qaeda militant passed through several airline security checks with a bomb hidden in his intestine. He later detonated the bomb with a cell phone signal, but failed in his attempt to assassinate a prominent Saudi prince.

"While not wanting to be alarmist, I admit this is alarming," said Richard Barrett, head of the United Nations' al-Qaeda and Taliban monitoring group.

"Even though its capability is reduced, it is clear that al-Qaeda remains determined enough and inventive enough to cause another terrorist spectacular."

Last month US authorities foiled an alleged al-Qaeda terrorist plot in New York and also arrested two potential suicide bombers after they repeatedly tried to detonate large bombs using cell phones.

Mr Barrett was addressing the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where he described how the terrorist organisation's effectiveness had been much reduced across the world. The use of spies, targeted assassinations and the cooperation of governments had greatly reduced al-Qaeda's effectiveness, he said.

The organisation is "losing credibility" among its potential supporters and its recent efforts "have not awed people" he concluded.

Mr Barrett also noted that al-Qaeda "hasn't really made a connection to a new generation" of young Muslims who have little recollection of the events and are less interested in religion.

But he also warned that the organisation's power to sow terror was far from eliminated, and described how its use of a well-known drug smugglers technique had already been shown to have breached airline security.

The frightening episode occurred on August 28 last when, Abdullah al-Asiri, one of Saudi Arabia's most wanted men, offered to give himself up to Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef, the head of Saudi Arabia's counter terrorism operations.

Prince Nayef is responsible for overseeing Saudi Arabia's much trumpeted terrorist rehabilitation programme, and some two dozen senior al-Qaeda terrorists have already surrendered to him in person.

This time the would-be assassin, the ostensibly repentant Asiri, gave himself up and took two flights, one aboard the Prince's private jet, and spent 30 hours closely guarded by the Prince's personal security detail. It was during the month of Ramadan, a time of repentance for Muslims and Asiri was granted an audience with the prince at his private palace in Jeddah, by declaring that he would persuade other militants to surrender.

Asiri briefly called other militants to tell them that he was standing alongside Prince Nayef. It was all recorded by al-Qaeda who has turned the episode into an animated movie boasting of their exploits. During the conversation a bleep was heard between two identical phrases repeated by the bomber and the man he is speaking to. This keypad sound or text message may have activated a short fuse on the bomb, according to security experts.

Asiri then declared that more al-Qaeda figures wanted to surrender and asks the prince to take the cell phone. Some 14 seconds later the bomb went off.

The explosion blew Asiri to pieces and left his left arm embedded in the ceiling. Security experts believe the explosive and an electronic detonator was probably contained in a long thin animal gut casing to protect it from stomach acid.

By becoming coiled inside Asiri's large intestine, the bomb would have gained additional explosive force. The Saudis believe the bomb weighed 100 grams and was made with PETN plastic explosive, to avoid detection by airport and other metal detectors. This is the same explosive that was used by the shoe bomber Richard Reid who attempted to blow up an American Airlines flight between Paris and Miami in 2001.

Scott Stewart, a terrorism expert for Stratfor, a global intelligence company, said that metal detectors at airports were vulnerable, depending on how old they were and how they were calibrated.

"Many are set to screen for large metal items like guns and knives," he said, and "it takes too long to screen people if you are looking for every tiny trace of metal."

"Electric detonators can also be made with very little metal" he said, although he claimed the Prince Nayef device should have been picked up by a modern metal detector."

Al-Qaeda later claimed responsibility for the attack boasting: "Al-Asiri managed to pass all the security checkpoints in Najran and Jeddah airports and was transported on board Mohammed bin Nayef's private plane." Al-Qaeda threatened more surprise attacks in the "near future", and security measures were already being taken to counter suicide bomber getting aboard aircraft.

"It would likely have a catastrophic result if employed on an aircraft," Mr Stewart said, "Richard Reid's shoe only contained about four ounces of explosives, an amount that could conceivably be smuggled inside a human."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/6258137/New-al-Qaeda-body-bombs-that-can-beat-airport-security-are-alarming-terror-experts.html>