

DHS FEAR-MONGERS OFF APPARENT DIMINISHMENT IN IBRAHIM AL-ASIRI'S SKILLS

The Department of Homeland Security wants you to be afraid of the latest handiwork of AQAP's bomb-maker, Ibrahim al-Asiri. They've issued a warning (and leaked that warning) about new-and-improved shoe bombs.

Senior U.S. officials say that Wednesday's terror warning about international air travel, first reported by NBC News, is the result of recent chatter about Ibrahim al-Asiri, the al Qaeda bombmaker from Yemen responsible for several high-profile bombing attempts against U.S. targets.

On Wednesday, the Department of Homeland Security warned airlines of new information related to the possibility of bombs or bomb material hidden in shoes, like the device that shoe bomber Richard Reid used to try to take down a plane over the Atlantic in December 2001.

Now, perhaps this is a grave new worry.

But the first thing I thought of when I heard about this warning was the warning DHS issued two years ago, 10 days after they had flown the Saudi-British infiltrator into AQAP out of Yemen with the undiebomb he was allegedly given to use against a US-bound flight.

DIANE SAWYER (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Good evening. As we come on the air, ABC News has learned that US authorities are studying a new terror

threat tonight, members of al Qaeda using body bombs, explosives that have been surgically implanted in their bodies to evade security. Tomorrow, it will be the one-year anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death, making this week a time of heightened concern on the ground and in the sky. And ABC's chief investigative correspondent Brian Ross is here with these new details. Brian?

BRIAN ROSS (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Diane, well, tonight American and European authorities tell ABC News, they fear al Qaeda will use these so-called body bombs to target Americans overseas and US flights coming in from overseas.

GRAPHICS: SECURITY WATCH

BRIAN ROSS (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) As a result, security at several airports in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe and the middle east has been substantially stepped up, with a focus on US carriers. And additional federal air marshals have been shifted overseas in advance of this week's anniversary of the bin Laden raid. The plot is not so far fetched. Medical experts say there is plenty of room in the stomach area for surgically implanted explosives.

After that bit of propaganda, I fully expect the White House will roll out a thwarted plot in approximately 8 days. And then, after the initial excitement, we'll learn the plot (if it was indeed a plot and not a sting) was actually thwarted (if it was indeed a plot and not a sting) back on February 14.

Bonus points: this plot will have been foiled using the phone dragnet.

And aside from the skepticism I have given DHS'

past manipulation of Asiri warnings, there's one more problem with DHS crying wolf like this.

Two years ago, anonymous leakers from the very same vicinity as this week's leakers assured us that Asiri had mastered the process of surgically placing operational bombs inside a person's stomach cavity. Virtually undetectable, even with Michael Chertoff's best boondoggle machines!

And now, with two more years to perfect his craft, DHS claims that Asiri is making ... shoe bombs?

Really? Shoe bombs?

We're supposed to be panicked that Asiri's skill has apparently regressed from where – these same anonymous leakers claimed – it was two years ago, that Asiri can no longer make undetectable cavity bombs but has instead returned to a ploy Al Qaeda used 12 years ago?

Again, maybe this threat is real. If it is, it's too damn bad DHS has already squandered its credibility with past inflammatory warnings about Asiri's skill.