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Plane bomb suspect had 'enough explosives to rip hole in aircraft'

Claim in US newspaper comes as postings on Islamic web forum appear to offer more details about man held over failed bombing

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Plane bomber suspect Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's underpants with alleged explosive material. Photograph: Reuters

The explosives used in the failed suicide bombing of a transatlantic flight on Christmas Day were powerful enough to have blown a hole in the side of the aeroplane, according to a US newspaper.

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab allegedly used the military explosive PETN, concealed in his underwear, in an attempt to blow up the Northwest Airlines flight over Detroit.

Two US federal sources [told the Washington Post](#) that the 23-year-old Nigerian had enough of the material to seriously damage the aircraft.

Abdulmutallab, who was reportedly living in [Yemen](#) until earlier this month, allegedly had about 80g of PETN strapped to his leg – more than twice the amount used by the shoe bomber, Richard Reid, in 2001.

Hans Michels, an explosives expert at Imperial College London, [told the Guardian](#) on Sunday it would take little more than 100g to destroy a car.

US authorities are now examining a badly damaged syringe which was allegedly used as a detonator. Michels said the syringe could have been converted into an electrical detonator, but it was more likely it was filled with nitroglycerin.

The details of the explosives came as internet postings on an Islamic chatroom emerged that appeared to give more information about the failed bombing suspect.

Postings on the [Islamic Forum website](#) appear to match up with known details about him. A "farouk1986" – Abdulmutallab's middle name and birth year – writes of a "dilemma between liberalism and extremism" as a Muslim, and how he felt "lonely" at a British-curriculum boarding school in Togo because of a lack of other Muslims. He also talks about how he "never found a true Muslim friend".

"I'm active, I socialise with everybody around me, no conflicts, I laugh and joke but not excessively," he wrote in a message seeking counselling from other forum users.

The Washington Post said intelligence officials had yet to independently confirm the authenticity of the postings between 2005 and 2007. As well as writing about being born in 1986 and attending a British boarding school in Togo, farouk1986 wrote about visits to London, the US and other countries, including Egypt and Yemen – places Abdulmutallab is known to have travelled to.

Abdulmutallab has been charged with attempting to blow up an airliner, a crime with a maximum of 20 years in prison, but is likely to face additional charges.

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