

## The Christmas Bomber

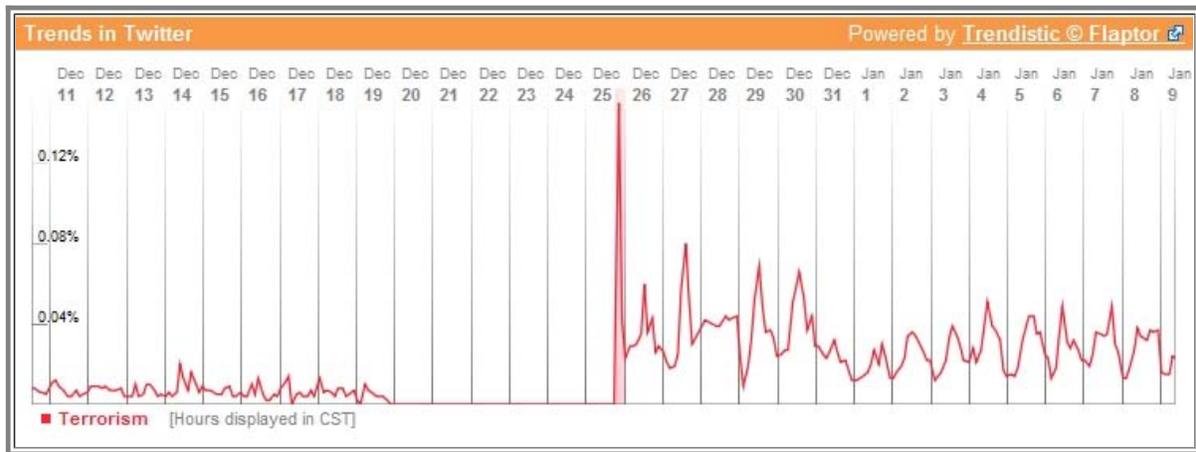
It was Christmas, after all. There had been breaking news the day before when the Senate passed their bill on health care reform. And the day before when an airliner overshot a runway while landing. And the day before four breaking news stories. ETC! It was time for a break for Washington Post breaking news personnel. So the Christmas bomber failing to blow up the Delta plane from Amsterdam to Detroit was not breaking news. The Christmas bomber never became breaking news for The Washington Post -- though he got plenty of column inches there.

There seemed to be no single twitter stream focused on the bomber to capture; at least I was unable to find one. So I went with three:

"airline attack" and "airline bomb" and "terror threats" though the last of these I started somewhat later than the other two.

Like the Post breaking news personnel I was also on vacation, and my laptop had died. So I did not get started with data collection until four or five days after the event.

But here is a telling image:



This is a search for "terrorism," which is none of the above. Notice it was down to, effectively, zero before the 25th. On the 25th it spikes up to quite a substantial number of messages, and that is followed by 14 days of substantial microblogging about terrorism. The Christmas bomber was not the only topic of communication so much of it does not use the above language. But a great deal of the spike and subsequent microblogging was precipitated by this single, effective attempt to make the headlines.

And there was lots of breaking news according to The Washington Post

### News Alert

07:00 PM EST Friday, December 25, 2009

White House official says Detroit airline incident was attempted act of terrorism

A Nigerian national, claiming to be acting on behalf of al-Qaeda, is in custody in Detroit after allegedly attempting to light an incendiary device aboard a Northwest Airlines flight after it landed Friday, federal officials said. A White House official said the incident was an attempted act of terrorism.

For more information, visit [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) -

<http://link.email.washingtonpost.com/r/TNGYL1/D2GHX/TLYM4O/UO3KSP/FQA5K/1G/t>

### News Alert

03:51 PM EST Saturday, December 26, 2009

U.S. authorities charge Nigerian man with attempting to destroy aircraft

U.S. authorities charge Abdul Farouk Abdulmutallab in a federal criminal complaint with attempting to destroy a Northwest Airlines aircraft on its final approach to Detroit Metropolitan Airport on Christmas Day and with placing a destructive device on the aircraft.

For more information, visit [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) -

<http://link.email.washingtonpost.com/r/6041ZA/VRIV0/Y8SKYA/V0PNVM/KFWPC/28/t>

News Alert - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/?referrer=email>

2:25 p.m. ET December 27, 2009

Security surrounds Northwest jet in Detroit - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>  
Plane with same flight number as Christmas Day incident lands at Detroit airport, requests emergency assistance.

For more information, visit washingtonpost.com - <http://www.washingtonpost.com?referrer=email>

Better 'late than never' a breaking news for bin Laden.

News Alert  
06:07 AM EST Sunday, January 24, 2010

Breaking News National: Bin Laden Claims Christmas bombing attempt

Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden claimed responsibility for the Christmas Day airline bombing attempt in Detroit, in a audio message released Sunday, and vowed further attacks on the U.S.

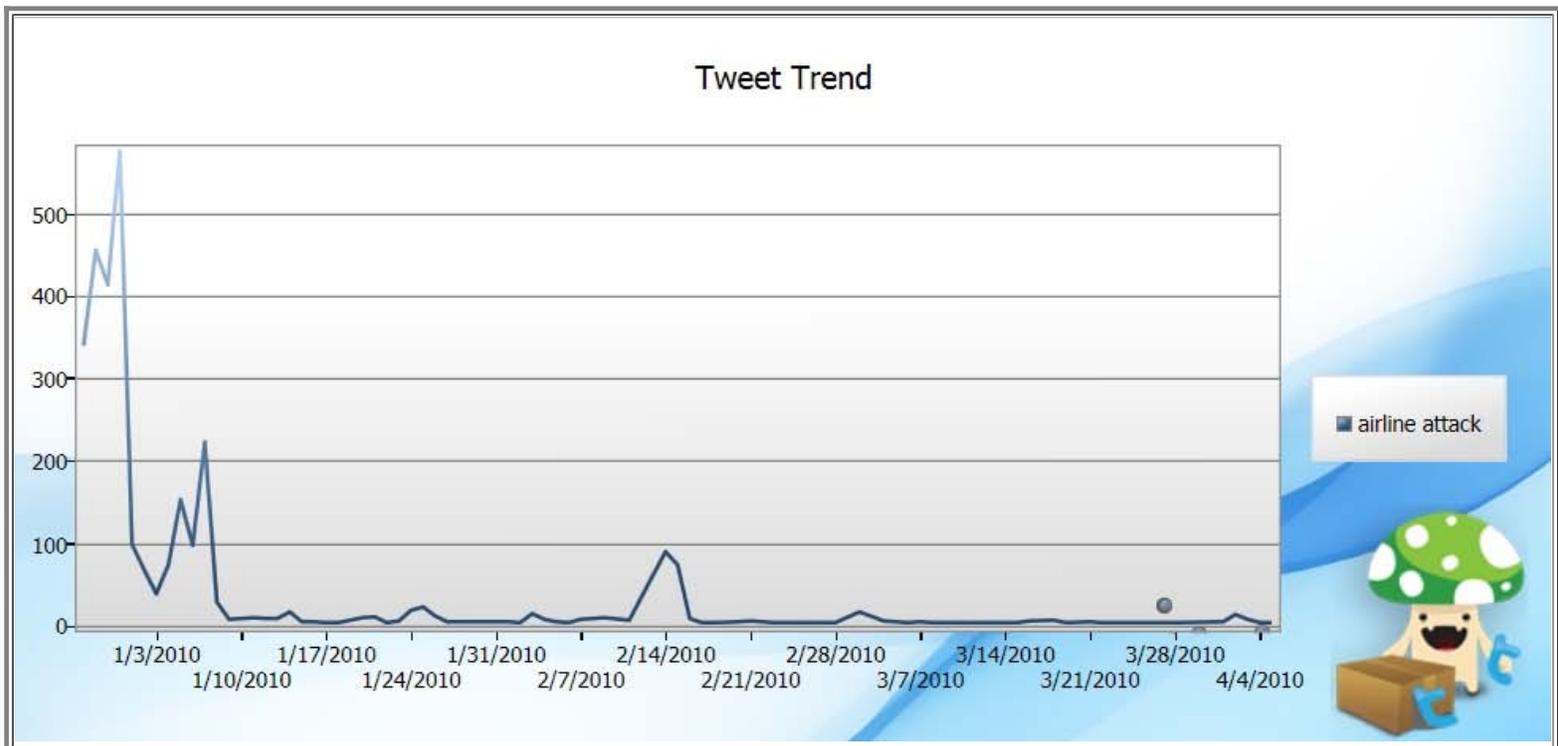
There was no way to confirm the voice was actually that of Bin Laden, but it resembled previous recordings attributed to him.

For more information, visit washingtonpost.com - <http://link.email.washingtonpost.com/r/0H2RO6/5GY1D/QPXA7G/BQ8YCK/GSTWC/UP/t>

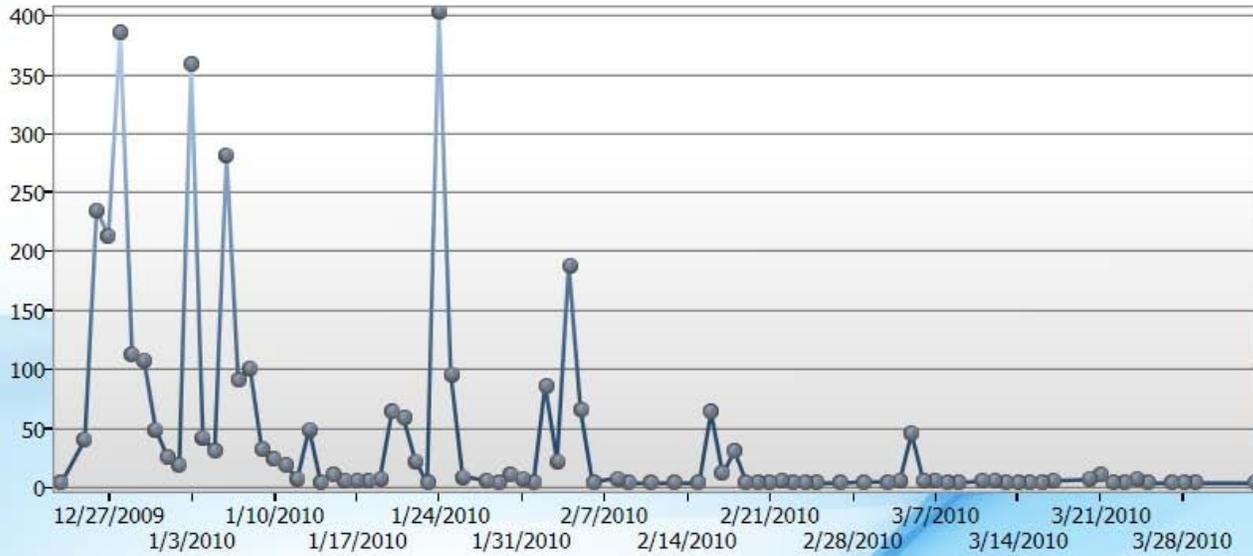
There was lots of breaking news, but relatively little microblogging. Finding a single search term did not seem to work as the language changed over time.

So, three search terms 'airline attack' was first, followed by 'airline bombs,' and that followed by 'terror threats'. This was pursuing the language being used to characterize the event.

The three figures give the various timelines.



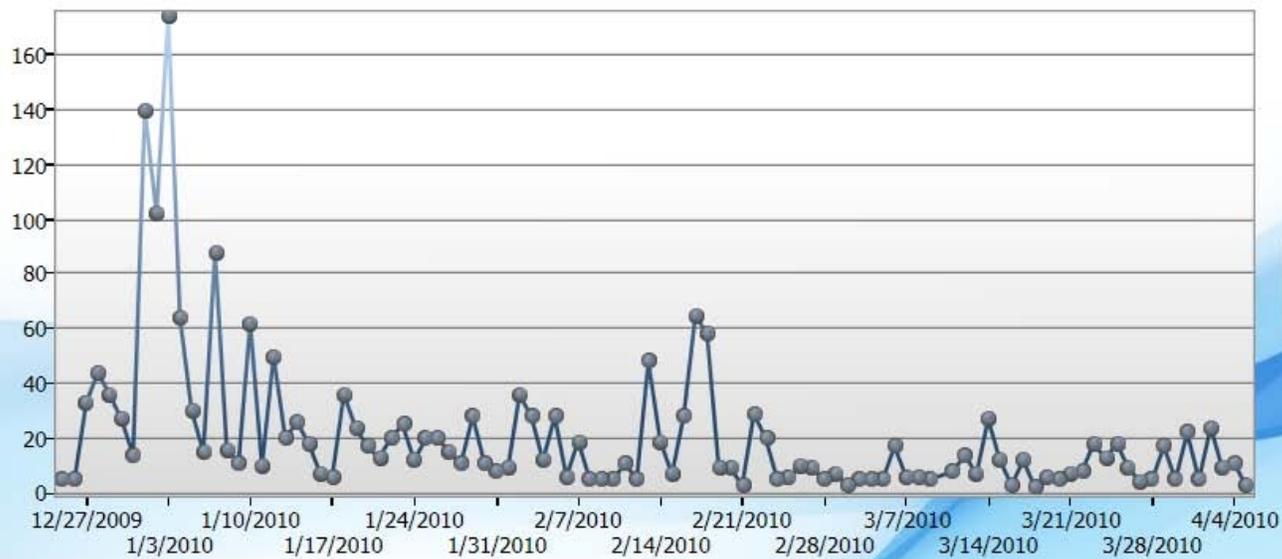
### Tweet Trend



airline bomb



### Tweet Trend



terror threats



One of the really remarkable findings is how infrequently 'terror threats' is used in microblogging. Given the everyday attention to terrorism and to suicide attacks it seems odd that this construction is not used more often.

The data files are [airline attack.xml](#), [airline attack.txt](#), [airline bomb.xml](#), [airline bomb.txt](#), [terror threats.xml](#), and [terror threats.txt](#).

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