



White House Security Breach Prompts Hearing

Congress is calling for a hearing on the November 24 incident involving a married couple crashing a White House State Dinner being hosted by President Barack Obama for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Although the couple apparently posed no threat and successfully passed a metal detector test, the fact remains that even though they were not authorized to attend, they succeeded in meeting the President face to face, a very serious breach of security.



Being called to the December 3 hearing are the two party crashers, Michael and Tareq Salahi, and Secret Service Director Mark Sullivan. Representative Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), the highest-ranking Democrat on the House Homeland Security committee, wants to know why the Secret Service allowed the couple into the dinner even though they were not on the guest list.

"This is a time for answers," Thompson noted in a November 30 statement. "This is not the time for political games or scapegoating to distract our attention from the careful oversight we must apply to the Secret Service and its mission."

The GOP's highest-ranking member on the same committee, Representative Peter King (R-N.Y.), agrees that an investigation is needed, though he wants to be certain that no details of Secret Service procedures are revealed that would further compromise security. King indicated that he has attended at least 40 invitation-only events at the White House and security has always been top-notch.

Some members of Congress have gone so far as to call for criminal charges against the couple, though the Secret Service has not yet done this. Anyone else who simply barged in would have been arrested for trespassing at the least, possibly swarmed by agents and handcuffed if they didn't appear armed, or even quite possibly shot. It does seem strange that the couple has as of yet suffered no consequences.

Secret Service Director Sullivan has not yet indicated if he will testify at the upcoming hearing, but he has issued a statement saying his agency is "deeply concerned and embarrassed" by the incident.

"The preliminary findings of our internal investigation have determined established protocols were not followed at an initial checkpoint, verifying that two individuals were on the guest list," Sullivan said. "Although these individuals went through magnetometers and other levels of screening, they should have been prohibited from entering the event entirely. That failing is ours."

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs on November 30 stated that the President is concerned about the incident. "That's why there's an investigation," Gibbs said, but he also noted that the President is still



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confident in the Secret Service's ability to protect him.

The Salahis, for their part, have used their Facebook page on the Internet to publicize their exploit and draw attention to it: "Honored to be at the White House for the state dinner in honor of India with President Obama and our First Lady!" they wrote. Michaele Salahi hopes to become a reality-TV star, and is trying to be accepted for Bravo's *The Real Housewives of D.C.*

In light of recent incidents such as the false balloon-boy scare and the Salahi's security breach, it would seem advisable for the authorities to make an example of anyone who thinks that compromising presidential security is an acceptable publicity stunt. The Secret Service should also be held accountable for their part in an incident that could have had a much unhappier ending, lest nagging questions remain about presidential safety.

If no one involved suffers any ill effects, the media's reality-show mentality will popularize these kinds of exploits, encouraging others to follow suit.

Photo of Obama with Michaele Salahi: AP Images



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