



## **Executive Summary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Report on the White House Incursion Incident of September 19, 2014**

### **Introduction**

This document provides an overview of the facts leading up to and including the events of September 19, 2014, when Omar Gonzalez scaled the north fence of the White House, traversed the north lawn, entered through the front door of the North Portico, and walked through the interior of the White House before he was subdued. This document also summarizes a number of findings concerning the performance, organizational, technical, and other factors that contributed to Gonzalez's ability to enter through the front door of the White House. This document summarizes key facts and findings of the more comprehensive and detailed report analyzing the September 19 fence jumping incident. This summary document is provided in order to protect the report's review of the specific means and methods used by the United States Secret Service (USSS) to ensure the security of the White House.

### **Methodology**

At the direction of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Deputy Secretary, aided by the General Counsel, assembled a DHS review team consisting of senior investigators from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations and the U.S. Coast Guard Investigative Service and attorneys from the Office of the General Counsel. This independent review team conducted extensive interviews of USSS personnel; collected and analyzed videos, diagrams, photographs, internal USSS policy documents, training manuals, and other investigatory materials relevant to the September 19, 2014 incident; and received multiple briefings regarding the means and methods employed by the USSS to protect the White House.

### **Secret Service Interactions with Gonzalez Prior to September 19, 2014:**

On July 19, 2014, Virginia law enforcement stopped Omar Gonzalez for driving violations. At the time, Gonzalez had eleven firearms in his possession, including a

shotgun with a barrel length that was in violation of Virginia law. Gonzalez was arrested at the scene and later released on bond.

On July 21, 2014, during a subsequent search of Gonzalez's vehicle, Virginia State Police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) located a map of Washington, DC with the White House and two other sites highlighted.

ATF contacted the local USSS office based upon the discovery of the map; however, the local office made a judgment that Gonzalez did not warrant further protective intelligence investigation and did not report the matter to the headquarters-based Protective Intelligence and Assessment Division. Subsequent to the discussions between the local ATF and USSS offices, the Virginia Fusion Center issued a report outlining the interaction with Gonzalez; this report caused the USSS Protective Intelligence and Assessment Division to open an investigation of Gonzalez. By August 15, 2014, the Secret Service obtained Gonzalez's medical records and military records, and interviewed Gonzalez.

On August 25, 2014, USSS Uniformed Division Officers observed Gonzalez near the White House with a hatchet concealed underneath his clothes. USSS interviewed Gonzalez and, after determining that his possession of the hatchet did not violate D.C. law, released him. Shortly thereafter, a USSS Special Agent working in the White House Joint Operations Center ran Gonzalez's name through a USSS protective intelligence database and learned that Gonzalez was the subject of an open protective intelligence case. The Special Agent requested that Gonzalez be reinterviewed. USSS Officers found Gonzalez within a few minutes, interviewed him again, and, with Gonzalez's consent, searched his vehicle, finding several empty firearms cases, four hatchets, several bottles of urine, and camping gear. Gonzalez was again released as the responding unit determined that there were no violations of District of Columbia law and Gonzalez's actions or words did not suggest he was a danger to himself or to others. Later in the evening, in response to an anonymous report of a man in a vehicle with a rifle, District of Columbia Metropolitan Police responded to the scene and found Gonzalez in the vehicle with empty rifle cases.

On August 26, 2014, USSS Uniformed Division Officers discussed the hatchet incident. Without consulting with USSS counsel or the D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office, the supervisor on duty instructed Uniformed Division Officers to arrest Gonzalez if he was found in possession of the hatchet near the White House. Later in the day Uniformed Division personnel interacted with Gonzalez and, with his consent, searched Gonzalez, finding only a folding knife that was returned to him. Gonzalez stated that he intended to

leave Washington, D.C., and the Officers determined that possession of the pocket knife did not warrant arrest. Gonzalez was released, but a USSS unit was told to monitor him until he left the area in his vehicle.

On August 27, 2014, Gonzalez contacted the Roanoke USSS field office and reported his encounter with the USSS at the White House on August 25th involving his possession of a hatchet. Thereafter, a Special Agent from the Roanoke USSS field office notified the Virginia state prosecutor of the hatchet incident and attended the preliminary criminal hearing on Gonzalez's Virginia state criminal charges.

### **The Events of September 19, 2014:**

In the hour or so before Gonzalez began to climb over the North Fence of the White House grounds, four Secret Service Uniformed Division Officers, three of whom recognized Gonzalez from the "hatchet incident" on August 25, 2014, saw Gonzalez at various points near the White House complex. Not observing Gonzalez exhibit any unusual behavior, they did not engage Gonzalez or notify the Joint Operations Center or any other USSS unit that he was seen near the White House.

Several seconds before Gonzalez started to climb over the fence, Uniformed Division Officers observed him preparing to climb the fence and began running towards him, giving him verbal commands to stop and get down. Gonzalez ignored their commands and, at 7:19:55 p.m., began climbing the fence. One Officer announced over his portable radio that there was a fence jumper. The Officer did not make any additional broadcasts over the radio because he did not want to talk over other responders inside the White House grounds. The Officers outside the fence on Pennsylvania Avenue began clearing pedestrians away from the area.

Gonzalez climbed over the fence where a "trident," or ornamental spike, atop the fence was missing. When Gonzalez cleared the fence and ran across the grounds toward the White House, he activated several alarms. An Officer assigned to the alarm board in the Joint Operations Center saw the alarm panel alerts and also heard "jumper" over the radio. At the same time, another Officer assigned to the Joint Operations Center heard an unclear and muffled radio transmission and observed the alarm notification, whereupon, he announced over the radio that a jumper had entered the North Grounds. This Officer did not know that the Joint Operations Center, at the time of this incident, lacked the capability to override normal radio traffic and that his transmissions were not broadcast to Uniformed Division Officers stationed at the White House. He did not continue to

communicate over the radio because he wanted to keep the frequency clear for other responding Officers to communicate. After learning of the incident, the onsite commander of the Joint Operations Center elevated an internal White House notification alert system to signify a potential threat.

At the time Gonzalez climbed over the fence, several Uniformed Division personnel were stationed at the Northwest gate on Pennsylvania Avenue, but none of them saw Gonzalez as their views were obstructed by a construction project along the fence line. The Officers were alerted to the fence jumper by the radio traffic. Two of the supervisory officers directed the others to activate an emergency communication system to alert the Joint Operations Center and other posts. The Joint Operations Center, however, was unaware that this system was activated until after the incident.

A few seconds after Gonzalez made it over the fence, two Emergency Response Team Officer-Technicians heard an unintelligible yell outside their booth and commotion over the radio. They also noticed Secret Service personnel moving people away from the North Fence line. The two Officers ran out of the booth within three seconds of Gonzalez hitting the ground on the north side of the fence.

Both Officers ran toward Gonzalez with their rifles pointed at him, but determined that lethal force was inappropriate because Gonzalez did not appear to be armed. One of the Officers nearly intercepted Gonzalez just before Gonzalez entered the bushes in front of the White House's North Portico. The Officer followed Gonzalez into the bushes, but lost sight of him as Gonzalez passed through the bushes and ran up the stairs to the White House's North Portico entrance. At the time of the incident, both Emergency Response Team Officers were surprised that Gonzalez was able to get through the bushes; prior to that evening, the Officers believed the bushes too thick to be passable. The Canine Officer who responded from a van parked on the White House driveway joined the second Officer in heading toward the door. By the time they arrived at the North Portico door, Gonzalez had already entered the White House.

At the time of the incident, the Canine Officer-Technician was stationed inside a van with his canine partner parked on the White House driveway. When Gonzalez jumped the North fence, the Canine Officer was on a call on his personal cell phone (on speaker), without his radio earpiece in his ear, and he had left his second (tactical) radio in his locker. The Canine Officer was alerted to the incident when he saw a Uniformed Division Officer running east on the outside of the North Fence. He then scanned the area and saw Gonzalez running toward the bushes. The Canine Officer did not hear any radio traffic announcing that there was a fence jumper, and his vehicle was not equipped

with monitors or speakers that could have alerted him to the alarm breaches, the activation of the emergency communication system, or the elevation of the White House internal alert system. The Canine Officer was therefore unaware of the activation of the emergency communication system, or any alarm or sensor notifications before he saw Gonzalez. The Canine Officer and his canine deployed eleven seconds after Gonzalez landed on the White House grounds. While moving toward Gonzalez, the Canine Officer gave Gonzalez the required verbal warning about the canine, caught a glimpse of Gonzalez heading toward the bushes, and gave his canine the command to apprehend Gonzalez. The canine, however, did not have enough time to lock onto Gonzalez and may not have seen Gonzalez at all. The Canine Officer mistakenly thought that the bushes would serve as a natural barrier and was surprised that Gonzalez was able to enter and pass through them.

An Officer stationed in another USSS vehicle parked directly behind the Canine Officer's vehicle had trouble seeing parts of the North Grounds due to the bushes (which at that time were six to eight feet in height) and the trees located on the North Grounds of the White House. These obstructions blocked the Officer's view of Gonzalez as he ran on the east side of the fountain. The Officer also was unable to hear any comprehensible radio communications about alarm breaks or Gonzalez until the Joint Operations Center relayed that Gonzalez had reached a post near the North Portico entrance. He was not alerted that something was occurring until he saw the Canine Officer begin to deploy from his van. By the time the Officer exited his vehicle and began yelling commands at Gonzalez, Gonzalez had nearly arrived at the bushes. The Officer was unable to reach Gonzalez before he entered the bushes and, as a result, went around the bushes toward the North Portico only to find that Gonzalez had already entered the White House.

The Officer posted outside the North Portico doors of the White House heard unintelligible traffic over the radio and saw Emergency Response Team Officers deploy from their post with their weapons drawn—he did not hear any communication announcing that there was a fence jumper. This Officer drew his weapon and took cover behind a pillar according to what he believed his training to require. The Officer's view was obstructed by bushes, pillars, and the vehicles parked in front of the Portico. The fading evening light also limited his overall ability to see.

The Officer observed Gonzalez exit the bushes and run up the stairs. The Officer pointed his weapon at Gonzalez, put his finger on the trigger, and ordered him to get down. Gonzalez did not obey, but the Officer did not see any indication that Gonzalez was armed or presented a threat warranting the use of lethal force. The Officer saw that the wooden mansion doors were closed and assumed that they were locked and that

Gonzalez would be cornered between him and the oncoming Emergency Response Team and Canine Officers. Believing that Gonzalez was trapped, and concerned that the canine might erroneously lock onto him, the Officer chose to remain in place and out of the way of the Emergency Response Team Officers, which he thought was what his training required. By the time he realized that the doors were not locked, Gonzalez was inside the White House.

The Officer stationed inside the White House near the Portico doors, seated in a chair next to a window, heard unintelligible noise on her radio. She looked out the window and saw the Officer right outside next to a pillar with his gun drawn. The Officer did not hear the activation of the emergency communication system and was unaware that the system at her post was muted. Realizing that she was in an emergency situation, she got up from her chair to close and lock the North Portico doors. She was able to close both doors, but Gonzalez barged through them and knocked her backward before she could lock them. The Officer gave Gonzalez verbal commands and attempted to alert the Joint Operations Center via her radio. Ignoring her commands, Gonzalez walked past the Officer toward the East Room. After attempting twice to physically take Gonzalez down but failing to do so because of the size disparity between the two, the Officer then attempted to draw her baton but accidentally grabbed her flashlight instead. The Officer threw down her flashlight, drew her firearm, and continued to give Gonzalez commands that he ignored. Gonzalez entered the East Room briefly and then began walking back down the hallway toward the grand piano located on the State Floor.

An Officer inside the White House and down the hall responded to the scene and managed to bring Gonzalez to the ground in the center hallway. Two Special Agents who had just completed their shifts and were located on a lower floor heard yelling from the State Floor, ran to the scene, and assisted in bringing Gonzalez to the ground. The Emergency Response Team members outside the North Portico did not immediately enter the Mansion. They were unfamiliar with the layout of the White House, and waited to assemble into a tactical formation before entering the North Portico door. By the time they entered, Gonzalez had already been subdued. Gonzalez was subsequently handcuffed, searched, and escorted out of the White House.

## Summary of Findings

### A. Training

The level of training for USSS Uniformed Division Officers likely contributed to Gonzalez's ability to breach the White House interior. Due to staffing shortfalls, USSS has not conducted regular training for Uniformed Division Officers. Moreover, to the extent training was provided to new Uniformed Division Officers, Emergency Response Team Officers, or others, the training did not prepare personnel for non-lethal force scenarios such as preventing a noncompliant individual from entering the White House Mansion. Further, as of the date of the incident, USSS training programs did not integrate personnel from the different divisions responding to incidents, which led to confusion regarding the various roles and responsibilities during a fence-jumping incident. Emergency Response Team members also never received familiarization training regarding the interior of the White House, which delayed their entry through the North Portico doors. Finally, Officers did not receive adequate training regarding the various communication systems at the White House.

### B. Staffing Decisions

In order to ensure that all security posts at the White House are fully staffed, USSS Officers are routinely required to work overtime and cancel days off. The Uniformed Division Leadership has also cancelled nearly all in-service training in order to use those work hours to place more individuals on active posts. In addition, the seniority-based system by which the USSS schedules the Officers for duty creates situations where junior Officers are overrepresented on a particular shift -- which was the case the evening of September 19, 2014. Finally, the requirement to work overtime causes many Officers to miss roll call, where important information is passed for the upcoming shift.

### C. The Immediate Response on September 19, 2014

In addition to the overarching findings discussed elsewhere in this summary, several factors specific to the September 19, 2014 incident affected the USSS response that evening: the ongoing construction that limited visibility and may have aided Gonzalez's ability to get over the fence as quickly as he did; the Emergency Response Team's reliance on the canine unit and erroneous belief that the bushes were an impassable barrier; the effect of inadequate information, poor visibility, and other factors; the tactical response of USSS Officers at the scene; and the lack of an automated locking mechanism for the White House doors.

#### D. Communication

During the September 19, 2014 incident, several USSS communications systems experienced failures that prevented relevant personnel from receiving notification of the fence jumper. A combination of technical missteps, lack of radio discipline, improper use of equipment, and aging infrastructure contributed to communications failures on the date of the incident that delayed notification to key Officers. The primary handheld radios relied upon by USSS Officers at the White House did not provide real-time notification as intended, in part because individuals using the radio talked at the same time and overrode each other's transmissions. After the incident, it was learned that an improper setting on the radio system also prevented the Joint Operations Center from centrally overriding all communications and pushing notification of a fence jumper out to the relevant Officers. Additionally, the Officers who activated the emergency communication system during the incident failed to provide details of the incident over the system, key posts inside the White House had "muted" emergency communication system receivers, and Emergency Response Team personnel stationed in vehicles only had radio communications to maintain situational awareness. Finally, although all the appropriate alarms were triggered by Gonzalez's movement through the North Grounds, not all the posts received that information.

#### E. Pre-Incident Intelligence

The USSS became aware of Gonzalez when the local field office was contacted by the ATF following the Virginia State Police arrest of Gonzalez and search of Gonzalez's vehicle. The local USSS office determined that the weapons, map, and ATF interview of Gonzalez did not warrant a report to USSS headquarters. At the time of the incident, the USSS had not issued guidance to explain when field offices should or must report subjects with an interest in the White House or protectees to headquarters. Such a directive would provide guidance to the field and establish a more standardized procedure for reporting incidents to higher headquarters. Additionally, the USSS headquarters division responsible for categorizing individuals as persons of interest did not notify the Uniformed Division of Gonzalez's extensive protective intelligence history, nor was Gonzalez listed as a person of interest for whom USSS Officers and Agents should be on the lookout. Further, Uniformed Division supervisors, without seeking legal advice from USSS counsel or the D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office, gave contradictory guidance on whether an individual carrying a concealed hatchet could be arrested for violation of D.C. law.



## F. Information Management

Instead of relying on a single “one stop” database for collection and distribution of protective and/or criminal information, USSS relies on a series of databases that are not interoperable and have varying levels of accessibility, a fact that hinders timely integration, dissemination, and sharing of information. Given the number of distinct databases that contain different information with varying levels of accessibility, many Officers expressed confusion or misunderstandings about the various databases. The USSS personnel who interviewed Gonzalez on August 25, 2014 did not have access to information contained within some of the USSS databases, information that may have allowed them to change the tenor and consequences of the discussion with Gonzalez.