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Fence breach under review

MAN ENTERS WHITE HOUSE WITH KNIFE

Iraq veteran had served
as a sniper, family says

**BY CAROL D. LEONNIG,
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The Secret Service on Saturday launched a security review to learn how a man carrying a knife was able to get inside the front door of the White House on Friday night after jumping a fence and sprinting more than 70 yards across the North Lawn — the first time that has ever happened.

Within seconds, the man who his public defender said served three tours in Iraq — and relatives said served as a sniper — got to the front double doors of the North Portico, turned the brass knob and stepped inside the vestibule. There he was grabbed and subdued by an officer standing post inside the door. He had a folding knife with a 2 1/2-inch serrated blade.

The success Omar J. Gonzalez, 42, had in breaching White House security Friday night — roughly 10 minutes after the presi-

dent and his daughters lifted off the south grounds in his helicopter for Camp David — exposed new, worrisome gaps in the Secret Service's extensive efforts to keep the first family safe and make the White House a "hard target."

The front door on the North Portico of the mansion was unlocked at the time. It is a frequently used door, just one flight of stairs away from the Obama's living quarters, and until now, the Secret Service didn't imagine an intruder could reach it.

A trained attack dog — the Secret Service's fail-safe measure for stopping intruders when officers cannot — was not released in this case. The reasons are under investigation.

The Secret Service trains its personnel not to shoot intruders on the grounds unless they appear armed, or are wearing bulky clothes or backpacks that could indicate they are carrying a bomb. Many questioned how officers can assess the real risk in the 20 seconds it takes someone to run from the fence to the mansion.

"This is totally and wholly unacceptable. ... How safe is the president if this can happen?" said Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), chairman of the House Over-



SUSAN WALSH/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Uniformed Secret Service officers walk along the lawn on the north side of the White House in Washington on Saturday. The Secret Service is coming under intense scrutiny after a man who hopped the White House fence managed to make it all the way through the front door before being apprehended.

sight and Government Reform subcommittee on national security. “I just can’t believe somebody can go that far without being impeded. The perception they are creating is only going to inspire more security breaches.”

The White House released a statement Saturday, saying, “The President has full confidence in the Secret Service and is grateful to the men and women who day in and day out protect himself, his family and the White House. The Secret Service is in the process of conducting a thorough review of the event on Friday evening and

we are certain it will be done with the same professionalism and commitment to duty that we and the American people expect from the U.S. Secret Service.”

On Friday at about 7:20 p.m., Gonzalez did the unthinkable, authorities said. The 42-year-old from Texas climbed over the north fence line along Pennsylvania Avenue, toward the eastern side of the house’s circular driveway. His breach set off the standard security alarm across the compound. Officers rushed to the North Lawn but were unable to reach him on foot as he ran, arms pumping, threading the



PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

An explosive technician in a bomb suit walks away after an inspection of a Chevrolet Cruze, left, whose driver tried to get onto White House grounds through a vehicle screening area Saturday. A man was arrested for trespassing.

needle between the fountain and a security guard booth and ignoring their commands that he stop.

Officers at the scene considered Gonzalez to be unarmed and likely mentally disturbed, a law enforcement official familiar with the incident said, and thus a low risk. It turned out Gonzalez was carrying the knife in his pants pocket. One source familiar with the incident said a sniper on scene had Gonzalez in his rifle sights just in case.

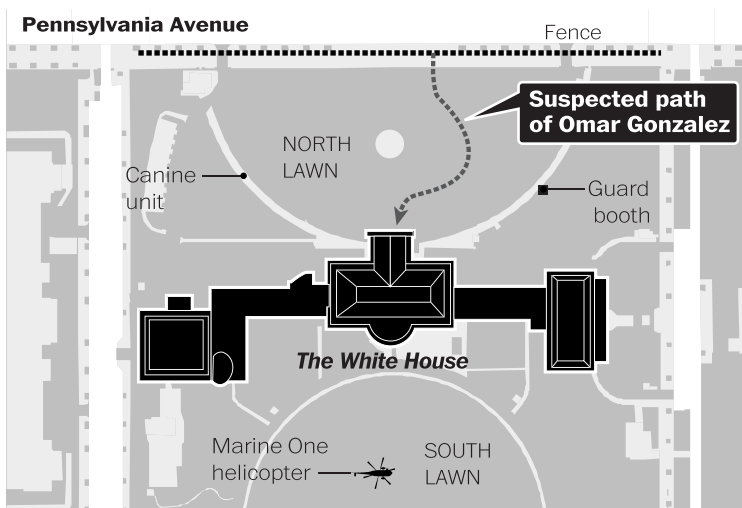
Edwin Donovan, spokesman for the Secret Service, said Gonzalez's ability to get into the executive mansion is "obviously concerning. ... What happened here is not acceptable to us, and it's going to be closely reviewed."

Chaffetz said he's not satisfied with the Secret Service's call for an internal security

review, and said he fears the agency's leadership needs an overhaul.

"The Secret Service has a serious management problem, and they have to acknowledge it. This is an agency that cannot make a mistake, ever," he said. "And this was one unarmed person. My concern: what if 12 people had jumped over? Then what? That's not out of the question."

Former agents said they fear the breach may be related to a severe staffing shortage the agency has struggled with in the last year in its Uniform Division. This is the team of officers with primary responsibility for securing the White House grounds, and the service has been flying in agents from field offices around the country to do temporary assignments. Those agents naturally would have less familiarity with the grounds and intruder response plans.



Source: Washington Post reports

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on-duty agent's radio and to the service's joint operations command center. Officers hear the blaring "BAH-BAH-BAH-BAH" alarm, followed by code instructions from the command center about the location, such as "Break 307" or "Break 302."

In many scenarios, if a jumper ignores officers' demands to stop, a canine-team handler will release a Belgian Malinois — a breed

The service, which once enjoyed a sterling reputation as an elite law enforcement agency, has struggled with some embarrassing episodes recently and the perception that its leadership is lagging in the best security strategies. In spring 2012, the service faced one of its most humiliating moments of its history, when a dozen agents were shipped home from a presidential trip in Cartagena, Colombia, where they were implicated in a night of carousing and boozing with prostitutes.

It's exceedingly rare for an intruder to get this close to the president's residence. But fence-jumpers at the White House have become an all-too-frequent part of the job for the Secret Service. Nevertheless, almost all of these individuals are stopped and subdued within seconds of crossing the perimeter.

A sensor alarm automatically goes off when any unauthorized person crosses the fence line, and is transmitted to every

chosen because it is considered highly intelligent — to stop the runner.

It typically takes a person sprinting across the grounds at least 20 to 25 seconds to run from the fence line to the mansion. Canine teams are trained to have the dog in position to be released within four seconds of the alarm sounding. The dog is trained to act as a missile, launching in the air to knock the subject down, and then biting an arm or leg if need be to subdue the person until the handler arrives.

But the dog was not released in this case, according to officials' review of the event and video evidence from Friday night. The Secret Service's security review will look closely at why.

"We're asking, why not release the dog?" said one law enforcement person who is reviewing the incident. "That would have stopped this."

The service's tactical canine team is a celebrated jewel in the agency's crown,

winning international awards year after year. It was created in 1976 for one purpose: to stop would-be suicide bombers from getting near the White House. The teams exclusively use the Belgian Malinois, considered a kind of “faster, leaner, meaner” German shepherd.

But the dogs cannot easily distinguish between good and bad guys. When sent in the direction of an intruder, they could also attack a nearby officer responding.

For that reason, Secret Service training manuals advise officers to try to collar White House intruders if they feel sure they can do so, and otherwise stay at their posts, so as not to create confusion for the dogs.

Scores of breaches

A 2003 Secret Service study found that fence-jumpers accounted for about half of nearly 200 security breaches in the previous two decades, cases in which an intruder defeated agency checkpoints or perimeters set up to protect the president and other officials.

But Friday’s incident with Gonzalez has the Secret Service highly concerned, officials said, because his success can help or embolden would-be assassins with actual plots. And it could erode what the Secret Service training manuals called “one of the best tools for deterring future attempts” — the White House’s aura of invulnerability.

Gonzalez made it over the fence line just minutes after Obama and the first family took off from the South Lawn on a Marine One helicopter bound for Camp

David. The White House grounds were ordered evacuated briefly due to the breach.

After being subdued Friday, Gonzalez was taken for evaluation to the psychiatric ward at George Washington University, according to the official.

Gonzalez told agents who apprehended him that he was very concerned the “atmosphere was collapsing” and he needed to get the president to get the word out to the people.

Bound in handcuffs and manacled at the waist and ankles, he appeared late Saturday afternoon before D.C. Superior Court Judge Judith Bartnoff where federal prosecutors accused him of entering a restricted building or grounds while carrying a dangerous or deadly instrument.

The Assistant U.S. Attorney John Marston of the District asked that Gonzalez be held until the case was transferred to U.S. District Court and he appeared there Monday.

Assistant Public Defender Margarita O’Donnell argued that Gonzalez had no convictions, no arrest warrants, tested negative Saturday for drug use and had served 18 years in the U.S. military including three tours in Iraq.

“This is someone who has provided service to his country and shown commitment in his life,” O’Donnell said, in an unsuccessful bid to win Gonzalez’s release. The knife could have been related to his line of work, O’Donnell said.

Gonzalez spent six years in Iraq with Army Special Forces as a sniper, according

to his former stepson, Jerry S. Murphy.

“He’s a very good guy. He is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder,” Murphy said. “I don’t believe he had any intention in hurting anybody. He has served his country for years.”

He said that Gonzalez was not a terrorist but has been living out of his car the past two years, driving around the country with his two dogs.

Murphy’s father, the Rev. Jerry Murphy, said his ex-wife married Gonzalez years after their divorce. He said the two met while working at a Wal-Mart, were married briefly, and then divorced while Gonzalez was on one of his tours in Iraq. He said his son was the one who kept up with Gonzalez, who had packed up his Ford Bronco and was living under a bridge the

past couple of years, and staying where he could.

“I don’t really know the man, but I pray for him,” Murphy said.

While the Secret Service was answering questions and drilling down into the details of Friday’s response, it happened again. As if on cue, on Saturday afternoon, another person was arrested after trying to get onto the White House grounds. The man approached a White House gate on foot, then showed up a little while later in his car at another gate at 15th and E streets NW. He entered the vehicle screening area and refused to leave. He was arrested for trespassing.

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