

AIR INDIA REPORT

THE FINDINGS

JUNE, 1984 to JUNE 1985

June, 1984 The Indian Army invades the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest temple in the Sikh religion, and radical Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale is killed. The murder of Indira Gandhi in October of that year by Sikh bodyguards led to CSIS wiretaps of Vancouver Sikh activist Talwinder Singh Parmar shortly before Mrs. Gandhi's son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, is to visit the United States.

By October 1984, the RCMP had learned from two independent sources about a plot to bomb two Air India flights.

On June 1, 1985

Air India's Chief Vigilance and Security Manager in Bombay sent a Telex to Air India offices worldwide indicating that the assessment of threats received by its intelligence agencies revealed "...the likelihood of sabotage attempts being undertaken by Sikh extremists by placing time/delay devices etc. in the aircraft or registered baggage", as well as the fact that "...Sikh extremists are planning to set up suicide squads who may attempt to blow up an aircraft by smuggling in of explosives in the registered or [carry-on baggage] or any other means..."

(Selected report findings are in bold italic)

"The RCMP failed to transmit the June 1st Telex, warning about the possibility of bombing with time delayed devices in June 1985, to either CSIS or to Transport Canada."

LEADING UP TO THE BLAST

CSIS threat assessment says there is a high risk of an attack on Indian interests in Canada.

Three weeks prior to the bombings, two CSIS surveillants followed Mr. Parmar (one of the plot masterminds), Inderjit Singh Reyat and a third unidentified person into the woods near Duncan, B.C., where they heard a large explosion. Mr. Parmar and Mr. Reyat were allowed to continue on their way and the third person was never identified.

"CSIS surveillance was ineffective. Surveillants were unable to distinguish one traditionally attired Sikh from another. When a CSIS surveillance team observed experiments involving a test explosion conducted by Sikh extremists in the woods...the loud sound heard was misinterpreted as a gunshot. No photograph was taken of the unknown third person present (Mr. X.) because surveillants had not brought a camera."

June 17 A terrorist suspect cashes a cheque and gets his money in \$100 bills. Airline tickets are later purchased in cash in Vancouver for the doomed flight.

"...the behaviour of those who booked and paid for the tickets and checked in the bags should have raised red flags, but a customer service mentality governed at the time, and airline staff were not instructed to watch for indicia of harmful intentions."

June 18 James Bartleman, who was director of security and intelligence in the Department of External Affairs in 1985, recalls that on this date, he read a raw intelligence report — an intercept of a conversation — that he believed pointed to an attack on the Air India flight the "coming weekend." He says he took the report to a Mountie, who dismissively told him they already knew about it.

The Commission found that "James Bartleman's evidence that, shortly before the bombing, he saw a specific threat to Air India Flight 182, is credible."

RCMP headquarters approves keeping the same level of security for the weekend flight as per usual. Approval sent to RCMP airport offices in Toronto and Montreal.

"The view of Canadian officials prior to the bombing that government owned Air India was "crying wolf" in order to obtain additional security for free was misguided."

