

THE INEXPLICABLE TIMING OF DENNIS BLAIR'S OUSTER

I'm thoroughly unsurprised by the news of Dennis Blair's ouster. After all, it's an impossible job that appears to serve one purpose: to provide a deck chair you can rearrange every two years as a scapegoat for our continuing inability to detect terrorists even with all the surveillance toys we've got.

(Actually, if you're Michael McConnell, it serves a second, more personal, purpose: giving you means to privatize intelligence for the benefit of your once and future employers.)

But I've got a few questions after I read the following on Twitter:

Chuck Todd: MT @SavannahGuthrie POTUS asked for Blair's resignation; Blair appealed to Chief of Staff to make a rebuttal – an offer that went nowhere.

Major Garrett: + Feinstein: "I look forward to working with the President as he identifies his nominee." Feinstein Cmte rpt final straw for Blair

That is, if you believe the tweets of the White House Press Corps, Blair was ousted by Obama (thoroughly unsurprising news) in response to the SSCI report on the Undie Bomber.

Now, that someone would be canned in response to the SSCI report is also thoroughly unsurprising. It's a damning report, showing we've made little progress since 9/11. Now, several people—like Marc Ambinder and Jeff Stein—seem to think National Counterterrorism Center Director Michael Leiter should be the one canned over this report (and that's even before you consider that Leiter went on vacation right after Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted attack). Whoever gets canned, though, I'm actually a bit

pleased that someone will be held responsible for some pretty big failures.

So I understand all that.

It's the timing I don't understand. As Ambinder reported earlier this week, this report is not new. It's just new to us. The White House has had this report for two months.

The SSCI gave its report to the White House and the intelligence agencies two months ago, and an official told me last night that the the IC had made progress implementing many of its regulations. The new budget contains more authority for the DNI to make technical decisions more quickly, which should help with the database issues. A DNI official said that Blair "accepted" blame and is making necessary changes.

If the White House were going to fire Blair in response to the report, why didn't he get fired two months ago? Why let him start fixing thing (you know, shifting his deck chair), and then fire him?

Or did Rahm and Obama hold off on firing him until this report was declassified so he could serve as a very public scapegoat shortly after its release?