

THE (OTHER POSSIBILITY) INERT UNDIEBOMB 2.0

I'm cleaning up my desk so I wanted to return to something in this transcript from John Brennan's May 7, 2012 conference call with his predecessors at White House czar in attempt to pre-empt the AP's reporting on UndieBomb 2.0.

Fran Fragos Townsend suggested something that was clear at the time: the Saudis were leaking about the "thwarted plot."

TOWNSEND: John, we've got a source telling us that the tip, like sort of with the cartridge plot, came from the Saudis. All the statements reference international partners in cooperation. You obviously may not want to confirm that, but it would be an opportunity, if it absolutely wrong, to wave us off it.

Brennan doesn't so much wave her off it – indeed, he admits that some of our friends watch AQAP very closely – but he emphasizes international partners and services enough that, in retrospect, looks like a possible hint of British involvement too.

BRENNAN: What I will say is that we have nested this within the international cooperation among intelligence and security services, and I'm not going to get more specific than that. But as you can imagine, there are certain services that are involved in watching very carefully what AQAP is doing. This was close cooperation with them. But some of the operational sensitivities are of an international dimension. And so, therefore, I really cannot go into anything specific about which country or which service was involved.

Townsend then presses on why the Administration claimed this was not a threat.

TOWNSEND: Very early stages, which is why you're all saying that it was never a threat to the United States?

This is where Brennan uses his inside control line, while trying to strike back against the legitimate questions why the Administration mobilized the Air Marshals if the bomb was never a threat.

BRENNAN: The device itself, as I think the FBI statement said quite clearly, never posed a threat to the American public or to the public. And again, this is sort of wrapped up in the way that we became aware of this device, and the way it was managed, so that it was, again, as far as this device was concerned, it was not a threat. As you all know, one of the real struggles we have is what we don't know, and so, I see that there was, you know, a press piece that just took issue with, well, if this device was never a threat, why did the President direct, you know, Department of Homeland Security and others to take appropriate measures Well, as we well know, al-Qaeda has tried to carry out simultaneous types of attacks, and so we were confident that we had inside control over the – any plot that might have been associated with this device. But again, you don't know what you don't know.

Then Townsend floated something remarkable – and it appears she was doing no more than floating it and didn't really want an answer: the notion that the bomb was inert.

TOWNSEND: I say this not for a response. I mean, look, the other possibility is that you're confident because it was

inert. So I mean, I'm not looking for you to confirm it but I understand what you're saying about it was not a threat to the U.S. Thanks. Thanks for your help.

Kind of a notable suggestion from the former Homeland Security Czar.