

RELEASE IN  
PART B6

**From:** sbwhoep [redacted]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 30, 2009 11:48 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** H: Memo on terror blame game and yr response. Text and attached. Sid  
**Attachments:** hrc memo terror blame game 123009.docx

B6

CONFIDENTIAL

December 30, 2009

For: Hillary  
 From: Sid  
 Re: Blame game and your response

The abortive terrorist incident of Christmas Day has set in motion a whirlwind of finger pointing and blame casting, intensified and accelerated by President Obama's statement yesterday. You will be caught up in this, not least because of the failure to pass on information from Abdulmutallab's father delivered at the U.S. Embassy in London. Today's New York Times, in a lead editorial, emphasizes this lapse:

What makes this so much worse is that officials had something they can't always expect: fair warning. In mid-November, Mr. Abdulmutallab's father, a prominent banker in Nigeria, went to the American Embassy in Abuja to ask for help and warn them of his son's increasing "radicalization." The State Department, working with other agencies, had the power to revoke the son's visa or put a temporary hold on it. Officials say the warning was insufficient. That seems like a very bad judgment call. The embassy did pass on the father's information, as required, to the National Counterterrorism Center and the son's name was added to a database of 550,000 people with some alleged terrorist connections. Officials decided that the warning wasn't enough to put him on the list of 14,000 people subjected to more thorough airport searches or to the 4,000-person "no fly" list. That was clearly a very bad call.

The blame game includes the very clever Denis McDonough inadvertently setting up the President for a fall and meanwhile antagonizing agencies and departments across the board:

<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tobyharnden/100020934/barack-obama-gets-an-f-for-protecting-americans/>

Will Obama hold individuals accountable? Briefing the press today behind a cloak of anonymity as a "Senior Administration Official", Denis McDonough, NSC chief of staff (he gave the game away by saying he was from Minnesota), said that Obama "intends to demand accountability at the highest levels" before adding: "It remains to be seen what that means exactly." If heads don't roll – and soon – then Obama's words will seem hollow. It's an opportunity for him to show some real steel.

Newspapers, TV and radio are a blizzard of blame casting. DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano is a prime target, but even former NSC counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke has jumped into the storm on ABC GMA today blaming the CIA. Maureen Dowd, not missing any target for a drive-by machine-gunning, in a column headlined "As the Nation's Pulse Races, Obama Can't Seem to Find His," fired at nearly everyone, blaming Obama for "surrounding himself with Clintonites," among other obvious evils, and concluding: "Heck of a job, Barry." Yes, yes, the usual, and welcome to the Village of the Damned, Barry, but...

The point here is your forthcoming response, because when you return you will be asked, especially about the London Embassy lapse. You should take a different approach. Don't blame anyone in public! Don't blame the CIA, even though it was the London station that didn't pass on the information! Don't blame "the system!"

The model is President Kennedy in his press conference after the Bay of Pigs: "There's an old saying, that victory has a hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan. . . . I am the responsible officer of the government and that is quite obvious." JFK's statement contrasts starkly with President Obama's failure personally to accept responsibility, instead claiming responsibility solely for fixing the errors of others. In your statement, you must, first and foremost, accept personal responsibility as a responsible and constitutional officer of the government as Secretary of State. Only then, should you cite any efforts and reviews to fix the problem.

I have included below the Times lead editorial, Obama's statement and Ted Sorensen's firsthand account of Kennedy's private and public reactions to the Bay of Pigs.

## The New York Times

December 30, 2009  
Editorial

### The System Failed

Only luck and the courage of passengers on Northwest Flight 253 averted a tragedy on Christmas Day. When a Nigerian man allegedly tried to blow a hole in the airplane's side, the explosive powder he had concealed failed to detonate properly and passengers subdued him before he could do any more damage.

Terrorists will always look for new ways to breach security, and let's hope luck and courage don't ever run out. But as this case makes chillingly clear, the airport security systems put in place after the Sept. 11 attacks — complicated, expensive and hugely onerous for travelers — have serious flaws. And so do the bureaucracies that run them.

The apparent role played by a branch of Al Qaeda in Yemen — Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab told authorities that he had ties to Al Qaeda and got the explosive device in Yemen — underscores the need for the Obama administration to review its counterterrorism efforts there.

Let us be clear: the system did not work. It is disturbing that Janet Napolitano, the secretary for homeland security, seemed to suggest, even briefly, that it had. It is unseemly that so many Republicans are rushing to make partisan hay out of the near disaster. On Tuesday, Mr. Obama did a better job, acknowledging what he called a "systemic failure" in the nation's security apparatus and saying he would "insist on accountability at every level."

Everybody bears responsibility: the Bush administration for not connecting the dots before Sept. 11 and not doing enough in the seven years after to rationalize and improve homeland security; the Congress, under both parties, for blocking necessary changes and failing to demand others; the Obama administration, which has shown little interest until now in reforming what is clearly an inadequate security system.

The first issue is the failure of the diplomatic and intelligence screening process, which should have raised alarms long before Mr. Abdulmutallab got on a plane bound for the United States, multiple entry visa in hand.

What makes this so much worse is that officials had something they can't always expect: fair warning. In mid-November, Mr. Abdulmutallab's father, a prominent banker in Nigeria, went to the American Embassy in Abuja to ask for help and warn them of his son's increasing "radicalization." The State Department, working with other agencies, had the power to revoke the son's visa or put a temporary hold on it. Officials say the warning was insufficient. That seems like a very bad judgment call.

The embassy did pass on the father's information, as required, to the National Counterterrorism Center and the son's name was added to a database of 550,000 people with some alleged terrorist connections. Officials decided that the warning wasn't enough to put him on the list of 14,000 people subjected to more thorough airport searches or to the 4,000-person "no fly" list. That was clearly a very bad call.

The case has raised all too familiar and worrying questions about the degree to which the authorities are sharing intelligence — within the American bureaucracy and between countries. Officials told The Times on Tuesday that the government had information from Yemen before Christmas that Al Qaeda was talking about “a Nigerian” being readied for an attack.

Technology is also a major issue in this case. With all of the expensive screening machines, how did Mr. Abdulmutallab get 80 grams of PETN — the same material used by Richard Reid, the “shoe bomber” — on the plane? The failure was apparently both in Nigeria, where he started his travel, and in Amsterdam, where he boarded the flight to Detroit.

The incident raises the immediate question of whether this country and others should now buy and widely deploy so-called whole body imagers, which can detect the presence of nonmetallic objects, including lethal chemicals, plastic explosives and ceramic knives.

The machines have been criticized by privacy advocates. We’ve had some qualms, too, especially with early versions that showed the outlines of a naked body too clearly. But security officials have managed to blur the images and adopted other procedures that should allay those concerns. What is needed is a rigorous and independent process of evaluation for whole body scanners and other equipment — the Transportation Security Administration has 10 at some stage of development — to figure out what provides the best security at the most rational cost.

Additional security measures may be needed — subject to sensible evaluation. A reported new requirement that passengers on international flights into the United States remain seated for the last hour is puzzling since it wouldn’t stop a terrorist acting before then. Travelers will put up with a lot to increase aviation security. But it has to be a rational system that does not make them the first line of defense.

Finally, there is the question of how the United States deals with the growing presence of Al Qaeda in Yemen. The administration has been pressing President Ali Abdullah Saleh, with some success, to allow American operations — including drone or missile strikes — on Yemeni soil. Washington is providing \$70 million over the next 18 months to equip and train Yemeni security forces, and has dispatched special operations forces to do the training. The White House will now have to decide if these measures need to be further stepped up.

As soon as Congress gets back to Washington, it must confirm the heads of the T.S.A. and the customs agency, both of which have been under interim management for a year. There is no excuse for more politicking or delay with the nation’s security.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/12/29/president-preliminary-findings-regarding-attempted-terrorist-attack>

## **The President on Preliminary Findings Regarding the Attempted Terrorist Attack**

Posted by Jesse Lee on December 29, 2009 at 06:23 PM EST

Speaking at Kaneohe Bay Marine Base in Kaneohe, Hawaii, the President gave an update on the latest findings regarding the incident on the Christmas Day flight from Amsterdam to Detroit:

**THE PRESIDENT:** Good morning. Yesterday I updated the American people on the immediate steps we took -- the increased screening and security of air travel -- to keep our country safe in the wake of the attempted terrorist attack on Christmas Day. And I announced two reviews -- a review of our terrorist watch list system and a review of our air travel screening, so we can find out what went wrong, fix it and prevent future attacks. Those reviews began on Sunday and are now underway. Earlier today I issued the former [sic] guidelines for those reviews and directed that preliminary findings be provided to the White House by this Thursday. It’s essential that we diagnose the problems quickly and deal with them immediately.

Now, the more comprehensive, formal reviews and recommendations for improvement will be completed in the coming weeks, and I’m committed to working with Congress and our intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security communities to take all necessary steps to protect the country.

I wanted to speak to the American people again today because some of this preliminary information that has surfaced in the last 24 hours raises some serious concerns. It’s been widely reported that the father of the suspect in the Christmas incident warned U.S. officials in Africa about his son’s extremist views. It now appears that weeks ago this information was passed to a component of our intelligence community, but was not effectively distributed so as to get the suspect’s name on a no-fly list.

There appears to be other deficiencies as well. Even without this one report there were bits of information available within the intelligence community that could have and should have been pieced together. We’ve achieved much since 9/11 in terms of collecting information that relates to terrorists and potential terrorist

attacks. But it's becoming clear that the system that has been in place for years now is not sufficiently up to date to take full advantage of the information we collect and the knowledge we have.

Had this critical information been shared it could have been compiled with other intelligence and a fuller, clearer picture of the suspect would have emerged. The warning signs would have triggered red flags and the suspect would have never been allowed to board that plane for America.

The professionalism of the men and women in our intelligence, counterterrorism and law enforcement and homeland security communities is extraordinary. They are some of the most hardworking, most dedicated Americans that I've ever met. In pursuit of our security here at home they risk their lives, day in and day out, in this country and around the world.

Few Americans see their work, but all Americans are safer because of their successes. They have targeted and taken out violent extremists, they have disrupted plots and saved countless American lives; they are making real and daily progress in our mission to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and other extremist networks around the world. And for this every American owes them a profound and lasting debt of gratitude.

Moreover, as Secretary Napolitano has said, once the suspect attempted to take down Flight 253 -- after his attempt it's clear that passengers and crew, our homeland security systems and our aviation security took all appropriate actions. But what's also clear is this: When our government has information on a known extremist and that information is not shared and acted upon as it should have been, so that this extremist boards a plane with dangerous explosives that could cost nearly 300 lives, a systemic failure has occurred. And I consider that totally unacceptable.

The reviews I've ordered will surely tell us more. But what already is apparent is that there was a mix of human and systemic failures that contributed to this potential catastrophic breach of security. We need to learn from this episode and act quickly to fix the flaws in our system, because our security is at stake and lives are at stake. I fully understand that even when every person charged with ensuring our security does what they are trained to do, even when every system works exactly as intended there is still no one hundred percent guarantee of success. Yet, this should only compel us to work even harder, to be even more innovative and relentless in our efforts.

As President I will do everything in my power to support the men and women in intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security to make sure they've got the tools and resources they need to keep America safe. But it's also my job to ensure that our intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security systems and the people in them are working effectively and held accountable. I intend to fulfill that responsibility and insist on accountability at every level.

That's the spirit guiding our reviews into the attempted attack on Christmas Day. That's the spirit that will guide all our efforts in the days and years ahead.

Thank you very much.

## President John F. Kennedy on the Bay of Pigs

In April 1961, a still-new president John F. Kennedy authorized what quickly became "the worst defeat of his career," in the words of his speech writer and biographer, Theodore Sorensen.

That defeat was the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles armed, financed, trained and coordinated by the CIA and U.S. military. Their mission was to land sufficient forces in Cuba to spark a counterrevolution, oust communist dictator Fidel Castro and liberate their homeland.

In the event, the intelligence proved bad, the planning shoddy, the invading forces and firepower insufficient. Exile forces suffered heavy losses and 1,113 wound up imprisoned. Kennedy had had misgivings but felt preparations had gone too far to stop. His military and CIA advisers had urged going ahead, and Kennedy had not wanted to appear soft or indecisive.

In "Kennedy" Sorensen describes the day after:

"But as we walked on the South Lawn Thursday morning, he seemed to me a depressed and lonely man. To guard national unity and spirit, he was planning a determined speech to the nation's editors that afternoon and a series of talks

with every Republican leader. The Bay of Pigs had been – and would be – the worst defeat of his career, the kind of outright failure to which he was not accustomed. He knew that he had handed his critics a stick with which they would forever beat him; that his quick strides toward gaining the confidence of other nations had been set back; that Castro's shouting boasts would dangerously increase the cold war frustrations of the American people; and that he had unnecessarily worsened East-West relations just as the (nuclear weapons) test ban talks were being resumed. "There's an old saying," he later told his press conference, "that victory has a hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan. . . . I am the responsible officer of the government and that is quite obvious." But as we walked that Thursday morning, he told me, at times in caustic tones, of some of the other fathers of this defeat who had let him down. By taking full blame upon himself he was winning the admiration of both career servants and the public, avoiding partisan investigations and attacks, and discouraging further attempts by those involved to leak their versions and accusations. But his assumption of responsibility was not merely a political device or a constitutional obligation. He felt it strongly, sincerely, and repeated it as we walked. "How could I have been so far off base?" he asked himself out loud. "All my life I've known better than to depend on the experts. How could I have been so stupid, to let them go ahead?" "His anguish was doubly deepened by the knowledge that the rest of the world was asking the same question."