

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Sunday, November 11, 2012 10:16 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia (McClatchy)

From: Kennedy, Patrick F
Sent: Sunday, November 11, 2012 09:38 AM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Cc: O'Connell, Andrew M; Johnson, Brock A; Boswell, Eric J
Subject: RE: Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia (McClatchy)

Cheryl

Before the attack, Egypt, Turkey, Sudan, Italy, Tunisia, France and the UN had rep there

France and the UN pulled out after 9/11

But the question being posed has a false premise, i.e. that the US depended on foreign militia while the others depended on their own resources

The US had tertiary dependence on the militia, as our primary and secondary reliance was on first the DS personnel and the second on the QRF

The others did not have an internal second

Regards

pat

From: Mills, Cheryl D
Sent: Sunday, November 11, 2012 7:19 AM
To: Johnson, Brock A
Cc: O'Connell, Andrew M; Kennedy, Patrick F
Subject: Re: Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia (McClatchy)

Do we know who still has a dip presence there today?

From: Mills, Cheryl D
Sent: Saturday, November 10, 2012 03:35 PM
To: Johnson, Brock A
Subject: Re: Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia (McClatchy)

Thank you

From: Johnson, Brock A
Sent: Saturday, November 10, 2012 01:12 PM

To: Mills, Cheryl D

Subject: Fw: Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia (McClatchy)

From: Brock Johnson [mailto:]

Sent: Saturday, November 10, 2012 01:10 PM

To: Johnson, Brock A

Subject: Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia (McClatchy)

B6

Diplomats still in Benghazi say they had long questioned U.S. reliance on local militia

By Nancy A. Youssef
McClatchy Newspapers



On the day of the attack, U.S. officials had spotted a police officer taking photos of the compound from a villa under construction across the streets. This was the view the officer would have had of the compound.

- Nancy A. Youssef /MCT

Even before the deadly Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. consulate that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, diplomats from other nations and Libyan security officials had questioned the wisdom of a U.S. decision to rely primarily on members of a local militia to protect its compound here.

Diplomats here told McClatchy that while it's customary to depend on local forces to protect diplomatic missions, only the United States of the 10 or so foreign missions here allowed the local militia to be the first line of defense. The others said they instead depended on military forces from their own country to provide security.

"A few months ago, there was a small attack here and the Libyans fled," said a diplomat from a European nation who asked that he not be further identified so that he could speak candidly about his assessment of security here. "After that, I decided to only use special forces" from his own country.

"We never considered using the brigades," he said, referring to the 17th of February Brigade, the local militia that was considered the primary security force for the U.S. mission. "We assumed the United States had a special relationship with the brigades."

Said another diplomat who requested anonymity for the same reasons: "I would never depend on the brigades."

The diplomat said he believed U.S. officials were unaware of the extremist links of those who were guarding them. "The mistake of the Americans was not following the trail of Islamic radicals," he said.

For some, the cost of supplying security made operating in Benghazi prohibitive. The British, for example, brought in their own troops and also hired Libyans to provide security, according to Khalid al Hadar, who owns the compound that the British used as their offices here. But after a June attack on the British ambassador's convoy, the British withdrew from Benghazi. A British official told McClatchy that the realization that security would require a larger – and more expensive – British force in Benghazi helped fuel that decision.

Hadar said the British still check in periodically on their compound, where a shot-up bulletproof windshield from the June ambush still sits in what was the consulate's carport.

Who was responsible for determining how the United States protected its consulate here remains unclear two months after Stevens' death. According to the State Department, the ambassador, in consultation with deputies

and security advisers, makes all security decisions, though they can be overruled from Washington. At a hearing of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee last month, Eric Allan Nordstrom, who served as the chief security officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli from September 2011 until July, testified that he had requested additional security.

Charlene Lamb, the deputy assistant secretary for diplomatic security, defended the security procedures that had been taken in Benghazi, telling the hearing that there were five American security guards – the number recommended by Nordstrom – along with Libyans in Benghazi when the attack took place.

“We had the correct number of assets in Benghazi at the time of 9/11,” she said.

It is unknown what Stevens’ own position on security in Benghazi was. A Western diplomat here said the trip was Stevens’ first extensive visit to Benghazi since he’d assumed the ambassador’s post in May. The diplomat said that when he heard the attack begin about 9:30 p.m., he assumed “that Chris was long gone.”

The diplomat expressed surprise that Stevens hadn’t been evacuated at the first sign of trouble. “We used to take training from the Americans” on diplomatic security, he said.

How the U.S. vetted its local security force in Benghazi may be among the questions to come up Thursday when the Senate Intelligence Committee holds a closed hearing on the attack. Witnesses expected to appear include Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and Matt Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center. David Petraeus, who resigned Friday as director of the CIA after acknowledging an extramarital affair, had been scheduled to appear but will be replaced by Acting CIA Director Michael Morrell, according to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., the committee’s chairwoman.

On Wednesday, during a ceremony honoring Stevens, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the administration has, in the wake of the 9/11 attack, dispatched a joint State and Defense Department task force “to review high-threat posts to determine whether there are other improvements we need in light of the evolving security challenges we now face.”

Diplomats here, however, say they believe one such improvement had become obvious in the months after a NATO air campaign helped topple the government of longtime Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi: Don’t expect local forces to protect you when they can’t even protect themselves against local extremists and terrorists groups in a city now defined by reprisal attacks. In the past week alone, two police stations here were bombed and a police colonel’s patrol car was destroyed in front of his house; extremist groups seeking to wrest control of the city are the suspected culprits.

According to two guards who were at the compound that night, a four-member team from the 17th of February Brigade’s VIP protection unit was assigned to provide security inside the compound and serve as a quick-reaction force. The 17th of February guards lived in a house closest to the front gate. According to the guards, they tried to fend off the attack of as many 100 men that night, shooting repeatedly at them.

But 17th of February brigade leaders say they never considered themselves responsible for consulate security, and Najib Muftah, 25, a co-founder of the brigade’s VIP unit, denied that his group was in charge. “How could four people secure a consulate?” he said.

Consulate security that night was a hodge-podge of local groups, in addition to a handful of Americans, including Stevens’ bodyguard. Outside, members of Libya’s newly formed police force stood guard, sitting in their parked vehicles. In addition, as many as five unarmed Libyans who worked for the Blue Mountain Group, a Wales-based contractor, were stationed around the perimeter to watch for suspicious activity and search visitors to the compound.

But as a rowdy caravan of attackers came barreling down the road leading to the consulate, the police officers parked on the other side of the street from the consulate fled, according to a 31-year-old private security guard who was there that night. The security guard asked not to be named for fearing he would be targeted for working with Americans.

Earlier in the day, somewhere between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m., a member of the Blue Mountain Group reported that he had seen one of the police officers photographing the inside of the compound from the upper floor of a villa under construction across the street, according to the security guard, whose story confirms previous accounts.

But while reporters going through the consulate location in recent days discovered memos that suggested the consulate had complained to Libyan authorities about the incident, Interior Ministry officials in Benghazi said they were never contacted by U.S. officials.

Salah Daghman, the newly named deputy minister of interior for Benghazi, said that in any case it would be unlikely that members of his police force would have challenged the Islamist group suspected of leading the Sept. 11 attack. He described his men as "afraid of Ansar al Shariah."

"Everyone has a gun, he said. "Benghazi is not secure."

Members of the 17th of February Brigade first formed a "VIP protection" unit shortly after the anti-Gadhafi uprising began in February 2011. A group of about 50, they were trained by Qataris to protect the cavalcade of politicians and diplomats who came to Benghazi, which was then the capital of rebel-controlled eastern Libya.

"If anything happened to the envoys that came to support the Libyan people, people would have believed Gadhafi claims that we are all al Qaida," Muftah said. Among the foreign visitors the brigade's VIP unit protected was French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who made a stunning visit here after Gadhafi's government collapsed.

Stevens, who had been a special representative to the rebel government during the civil war, used the protection unit as well, but not so much for security but as guides in the city, Muftah said. After the war, the brigade continued to provide escorts as the U.S. formalized its presence here; most likely, Muftah said, because it was the strongest force in Benghazi.

In addition, the brigade had a base less than a mile from the consulate that could provide additional forces if needed, as it did Sept. 11. "And we had good relations with the United States," Muftah said.

Once the rebel government moved to Tripoli and nations began to reopen embassies there, the United States kept working with the brigade, as many of its troops were incorporated into the newly formed Libyan army. Once Benghazi had a trained and running police force, the Americans asked for police forces to be stationed outside the consulate, said Fawzi Waniss, the head of the Benghazi Supreme Security Committee, the group with responsibility for melding Libya's many armed organizations into a unified force.

As the security situation deteriorated, several Libyan officials and the Blue Mountain guards said they urged the United States to buttress security at the consulate, even as Stevens was wildly popular among residents here. The Libyans, they said, could not secure themselves from a mounting extremist threat.

"I told them, you should have your own security," Waniss said. "Don't depend on the Libyans."

But others have suggested that the U.S. officials may have felt such a step was unnecessary because the CIA had established offices about a mile away and had promised to send security officers to the consulate, if needed. All of the diplomats interviewed for this story said they were unaware of the CIA station's existence.

That in fact happened on the night of Sept. 11, according to a CIA timeline, which said security officers from the CIA station, which U.S. officials refer to as an annex, were dispatched 25 minutes after the first reports of trouble. It took another 25 minutes for the force to reach the consulate, however, because of resistance from militants.

One diplomat here said that while he appreciated the effort of the CIA guards to render assistance, 25 minutes in such a situation "is too late."