



Insight

The Bungling of Benghazi and Why It Matters

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Last week, the State Department finally corrected previous accounts of the attack on a U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012.

Previously, the Administration maintained that the attack was tied to protests against the anti-Islam film “Innocence of Muslims.” [U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice](#), went on five Sunday morning talk shows calling the attack “spontaneous.” “We believe a small number of people came to the embassy to... replicate the sort of challenge that was posed in Cairo. And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons.” Last week, the Administration conceded that there was no protest.

Give credit to the Administration for finally getting its story straight. Early reporting of terrorist attacks can be marred by misinformation, and it is conceivable that the Administration never meant to deceive.

What is more difficult to understand, however, is why the Administration stuck to its story for so long, despite eyewitness accounts, surveillance video and other reports disputing its version of events. Indeed, rather than exhibiting caution until the intelligence could be sorted out, Administration officials pushed their flawed narrative - even while hypocritically accusing Obama’s Republican opponent Mitt Romney of “[shooting first and asking questions later](#),” as ABC’s Jake Tapper points out.

The bungling of the Benghazi tragedy illustrates a number of tendencies of the Obama Administration that have implications beyond the attack itself.

First, as is so often the case, it's not the crime, it's the cover-up. The killing of a U.S. Ambassador is not the kind of story any Administration wants to dominate the news. But by pushing a narrative so open to criticism, the Administration inadvertently kept the story in the headlines, creating the perception that it was trying to hide something. It suggested that the Administration might be willing to bend the truth in order to promote a politically desirable account.

The Administration's lack of preparedness for the attack itself was bad enough. Its refusal to acknowledge what had really happened gives the situation the reek of scandal, akin to Fast and Furious or Solyndra.

Second, the episode reflects the Administration's naïveté about the Arab Spring. Intelligence indicated a gathering threat in Libya, and other countries were limiting their in Benghazi. [Former Libya Site Security Team Commander Andrew Wood](#) told a Congressional Committee, "We almost expected the attack to come. It was a matter of time ... [Al Qaeda's] presence grows there every day."

The facility in Benghazi lacked basic security features, yet the Administration ignored requests for enhanced security.

The State Department allowed a temporary American security detail to be replaced by locals who clearly were not up to the task. [Former Regional Security Officer Eric Nordstrom](#) says he was criticized by Washington for even asking for additional assets.

Some liberals are trying to shift blame from the White House to Congressional Republicans, citing budget cuts for embassy construction, maintenance and security. While Congress should not be stingy in allocating resources for embassy protection – especially in the face

of potentially devastating cuts under sequestration - [reports](#) indicate Benghazi was never on the Administration's list of requests for structural improvements for 2012 or 2013. And even if the building itself was unfortified, the Administration wouldn't have needed an act of Congress to post sufficient military personnel there.

President Obama insists that "the tide of war is receding" and "al Qaeda is on its heels." He cites Libya as an unqualified success story of his Administration. This overconfidence no doubt made it easier for officials to overlook intelligence about growing threats in Libya. After all, boosting security in Benghazi would have contradicted the rosy picture Obama likes to paint.

Finally, the Administration's attraction to a story about anti-American protests spiraling out of control is consistent with its propensity to "blame America first." There simply was no protest of the film in Benghazi that night. Yet Obama Administration officials not only told the American people there had been, but also went to great lengths to condemn the film, placing the blame on an imbecilic film maker rather than organized terrorists.

Getting to the bottom of what went wrong in Benghazi can help policymakers work to avoid similar tragedies in the future. To do so, the Administration will have to face some hard realities about the continuing terrorist threat and its own willful blindness.

Better late than never.