

# U.s. diplomatic mission attacks in benghazi and the aftermath



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On the day of the 11th anniversary of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, another attack unfolded--this time, on foreign soil, but still very much hitting close to home. Four U. S. citizens--the U. S. ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens; a Foreign Service information management officer, and two other U. S. personnel--died when members of the radical Islamist group called Ansar al-Sharia, one of many extremist Salafi groups, clashed with security forces in Benghazi after protesting near the U. S. consulate. It has been debated what has provoked this violence, but it was initially believed that it was due to an online film considered offensive to Islam. Earlier on in the day, in Cairo, there were protests being executed in response to the mentioned video, but whether or not those protests were related to the Benghazi attacks remained unclear in the few days following. The inflammatory video on Islam in question, titled, "Innocence of Muslims," is a 14-minute long film production that mocks Islam's prophet, Muhammad. It was uploaded to the video site YouTube in July, 2012, but didn't gain attention in the Muslim world until its broadcast on an Egyptian Islamist television station until early September. Only days after its broadcast, protests broke out in several cities throughout the Middle East and the rest of the world, including Cairo and some Western countries. Not only were there marches and shouting of anti-U. S. slogans, there was also the burning of U. S. and Israeli flags as well as the burning of some buildings generally associated with the U. S.

Islam strictly prohibits any depictions of the prophet Muhammad, unlike in Christianity, where Jesus is often depicted through paintings and sculptures, which Christians tend to worship. While some Islamic leaders praised

reaction to the film, and called for further protesting and burning of U. S. - associated objects, such as flags, others Middle Eastern leaders, such as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, condemned the attacks and reactions to the incendiary film, while also condemning the film itself. President Obama himself condemned the film, but reiterated that it was not an excuse for the violence that was carried out.

The filmmaker, once believed to be an Israeli Jew, is now believed to be an Egyptian-American Coptic Christian after it was revealed that he had operated under a false name, which landed him jail time for fraud. Egyptian Copts, the largest Christian community in the Middle East, are often the target of discrimination and attacks by militant Islamist extremist groups. Egyptian authorities ended up charging seven Coptic Christians living in the United States for insulting Islam and harming national unity, which is more symbolic than literal, for the fact that all seven live outside Egypt.

The tensions between Copts and Muslims in Egypt have risen recently due to the release of the low-budget film. As protests continued to erupt across the Muslim world, many Libyans condemned the attacks that happened on their soil and came together in a demonstration to show the United States that the attack did not represent Libya or Libyans, with signs reading phrases such as, " Chris Stevens was a friend to all Libyans," " Sorry people of America, this is not the behavior of our Islam and prophet," and " Thugs and killers don't represent Benghazi nor Islam. These Libyan citizens aimed to distance themselves from the attacks and the riots that ensued across the country and the world. In response to the attacks, Libya's government vowed to cooperate with the United States in order to find the perpetrators of the now

seemingly planned attack on the consulate. It is suspected that this attack had been planned for a while before its execution, and that it conveniently coincided with the onset of violent protests in response to the anti-Islamic film.

Later in September, violent protests surged in Benghazi--not against the United States, but for democracy and against the Islamist militias that still control a large part of Libya--to one of which the attacks on the U. S. consulate were linked. According to demonstrators participating in the protests and ousting of the militias, Libyans have had enough of extremists a year after ousting long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi, especially after the recent attacks.

On the other side, those who are pro-Ansar al-Sharia protested in support of the extremist group, justifying the killing of the Americans with the offense the U. S. had committed against Islam with the release of the now notorious film. After protests calmed and subsided (at least in the media), on the other side of the Atlantic ocean, many criticized President Obama of his handling of the attacks in Benghazi. Many on the conservative right accused him of being an "apologist" for Islamic terrorism and the killing of the four Americans.

This became a hot topic in the presidential debates in October, when presidential candidate Mitt Romney accused Obama of having gone on an "apology tour," where President Obama "apologized" to other nations for American behavior, particularly in the case of the anti-Islamic film. He referenced a statement released by the U. S. Embassy in Cairo, which stated that it condemned efforts to "hurt the religious feelings of Muslims," and <https://assignbuster.com/us-diplomatic-mission-attacks-in-benghazi-and-the-aftermath/>

that they “ firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others. Romney affirmed, as well as other Conservatives, that the current administration’s response to the attacks were not to condemn them, but to apologize to those who executed them. This also led to a debate on how soon after the attacks Obama referred to the events as “ terrorist attacks. ” It was affirmed that he did not immediately classify the attacks as “ terrorist” in nature, of which Romney accused him during one of the debates. This was a buzz topic for days in the media, as a fact check revealed that the President had actually delivered a statement the day following the attacks, condemning the actions as “ acts of terror.

Despite the myth having been debunked, even after the elections had ended and President Obama secured his second term in office, the handling of the events in Benghazi turned into a scandal. The suspicion remained that President Obama and the White House staff dealt poorly with the aftermath of the attacks on the U. S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi. There also remain questions on the motives behind the initial descriptions that the White House gave regarding the attacks, claiming that they were “ spontaneous. With much attention surrounding David Petraeus, who recently resigned his position as director of the CIA allegedly due to an extramarital affair, his description of the attacks during closed-door congressional briefings have been heavily covered in the media. Petraeus affirmed that the attacks in Benghazi were previously planned and executed by terrorists linked to Al-Qaeda. What it all boils down to, seemingly, is a game of words and semantics of “ terrorism” vs. “ spontaneous attacks. ” The line between truth

and speculation behind the attacks on the U. S. consulate in Benghazi and the film that coincidentally incited protests and violence among Muslims around the world remain somewhat blurred.

What has been clear from the start, though, is that the events that unfolded that day and in the days and weeks after, put pressure on an already strained relationship between the United States and the Muslim world, and provoked a new debate on the limits of freedom of speech. However, over the months following the events, it turned into a heated debate on U. S. foreign policy and the ways in which these sorts of attacks are handled when revealing them to the American public. Either way, consumers of media on such delicate topics--whether in the United States or abroad--are all too often caught in the crosshairs of cultural and political misunderstandings through the lenses of news outlets.

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