

Benghazi and the Deepening Crisis of the Obama Administration

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Global Research, May 16, 2013

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Terrorism](#)

The controversy over last year's Al Qaeda assault on US diplomatic and CIA facilities in Benghazi, Libya has been revived amid a deepening political crisis of the Obama administration.

Even as the debate between the Obama White House and its Republican opponents becomes more heated, however, the real issues underlying the September 11, 2012 attack, which claimed the lives of the US ambassador, Christopher Stevens, and three other Americans, remain hidden.

Some Republicans have gone so far as to suggest that administration's handling of the Benghazi affair could become grounds for impeachment of the Democratic president. There is a sense that Obama, also embroiled in controversies over state spying on the media and IRS harassment of groups politically opposed to the administration, is in serious trouble as a result of anti-democratic and militarist policies pursued behind the backs of the American people.

As always, the presentation of these developments by the American media is dishonest and deliberately misleading.

The media has largely reduced the matter to the small change of electoral politics; whether the White House—aiming to fend off a Republican attack on the eve of the 2012 election—had a hand in altering “talking points” prepared for then-US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, who provided the first public explanation of the fatal assault in Benghazi.

This thesis, advanced by the Republicans, suggests that the White House was determined to prevent the truth about Benghazi from interfering with Obama's plan to run on his record of supposed successes in the “war on terror”—most notably the assassination of Osama bin Laden. Thus, the administration misrepresented the Benghazi assault as a spontaneous anti-American demonstration by Libyans outraged over an anti-Muslim video produced in the US and aired over the Internet.

Some 100 pages of emails released by the White House Wednesday in an attempt to quash the controversy show that the CIA, the State Department, the Pentagon, the FBI, the National Security Council and the White House all intervened in the editing of Rice's script, with the State Department exerting the greatest pressure to remove references to Al Qaeda and Libyan Islamist militias that were present in its first drafts.

These concerns suggest that there was far more at stake than denying the Republicans an

opportunity to tarnish Obama's record, or that the current controversy stems merely from a Republican strategy for torpedoing the anticipated 2016 Democratic presidential candidacy of Hillary Clinton.

The overriding motive for concealing the identity of those who laid siege to the US facilities in Benghazi has its source in the tangled relationship that Washington had established with the elements that carried it out. Neither the Democratic White House nor the Republican leadership in Congress has any interest in probing this essential question.

For over a decade now, Washington under both Bush and Obama has sought to justify its military interventions abroad and its attacks on democratic rights at home in the name of a never-ending global war on terror, and specifically a supposed struggle to eradicate Al Qaeda.

The reality, however, is that the US and its intelligence agencies have long had a far more complex relationship with these forces than anyone in the US government cares to admit.

These are ties that stretch back to the founding of Al Qaeda as an adjunct to the CIA's efforts to foment and finance an Islamist insurgency against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan beginning in the late 1970s. Before that, American intelligence had long viewed reactionary Islamist organizations in the Middle East, Iran, and Indonesia as useful assets in the struggle against socialist and left nationalist influences in these areas.

September 11, 2001, we have long been told, "changed everything," but it did not fully change this relationship, which was so closely bound up with the terrorist attacks of that day.

In its intervention in Libya, Washington utilized Al Qaeda-linked fighters as a proxy ground force in the war to topple the secular regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, arming and advising them and using them to follow up the massive US-NATO bombing campaign.

Christopher Stevens was very much the point man in this relationship, having carefully studied the Islamist opponents of Gaddafi before the launching of the war for regime-change. He was deployed in April 2011 to Benghazi, where he coordinated the arming, funding and training of the so-called rebels, elements previously denounced by the US as terrorists and, in some cases, abducted, imprisoned and tortured by the CIA.

In October 2011, the imperialist intervention in Libya achieved its victory with the lynch-mob murder of Gaddafi, carried out by these US-backed forces.

One of the reasons that the Benghazi affair continues to roil political waters in Washington is that this same strategy is now being employed on an even larger scale in Syria, where once again even more dangerous Al Qaeda-connected militias are serving as the most important fighting force in the war to bring down Bashar al-Assad. As in Libya, the aim is to solidify US hegemony over the region's oil wealth at the expense of American capitalism's rivals, particularly Russia and China. In addition, regime-change in Damascus is sought as a means of preparing an even wider war against Iran.

With the Syrian intervention floundering, the Benghazi fiasco serves as a cautionary example of the potential rewards for success in these ventures. There are evidently bitter divisions within the American state apparatus over this policy.

The most likely explanation for the bloody events in Benghazi last September is that the relationship forged with Al Qaeda of the Maghreb turned sour in the aftermath of Gaddafi's overthrow, perhaps with the Islamists believing that American promises had gone unfulfilled and they had not been adequately compensated for their services. With the assassination of Stevens, who was the US envoy to the "Libyan revolution," they were sending a definite message to Washington.

This kind of "blowback" has a long and ugly history in US imperialism's global interventions. On September 11, 2001, those blamed for the terrorist attacks had previously been hailed by Washington as "freedom fighters" and supported in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Even earlier, the Kennedy administration's backing for the Cuban "gusanos" in the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba produced a layer of extreme right-wing terrorists in the US who were convinced that they were the victims of a political double-cross. This poisoned relationship in all likelihood played a role in the violent end of the Kennedy administration itself.

In the final analysis, the concerted efforts of the Obama administration, the State Department and the various intelligence agencies to avoid mention of Al Qaeda in the account of the Benghazi attacks was aimed at covering up the enduring covert relationship with this terrorist network and the fact that it is once again creating explosive crises in which the peoples of the Middle East and potentially the US itself are the innocent victims.

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