

The CIA's Benghazi Role

By [Philip Girdali](#)

Global Research, December 03, 2012

[The American Conservative](#)

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

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [NATO'S WAR ON LIBYA](#)

The various accounts of the Sept. 11 Benghazi incident in which four Americans died demonstrate that there is a profound misunderstanding of what the Central Intelligence Agency does and how it interacts with the State Department overseas. The U.S. ambassador in any country is the personal representative of the president of the United States, and he is nominally in charge of all the American officials posted to the country. But the key word is “nominally.”

The Chief of Station is the senior CIA representative, and he directs the activities of the intelligence personnel. His direct line of command is to the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia—not to the State Department—and that is the relationship that provides him with his authority. Normally, the ambassador has little desire to learn what the CIA is doing because he has no real need to know about the details of operations and is only interested in oversight relating to situations that might cause serious damage to Washington's relationship with the local authorities. Apart from that, the CIA operates independently and only shares partial information on what it is doing if the ambassador seems interested and there is a good reason to do so.

To cite one example from my own experience, the agency had a hidden microphone in the office of a top Italian Communist official in the 1970s, which enabled Washington to know exactly what the Partito Comunista Italiano was planning. The information obtained was shared through an unsourced “eyes only” memo to the ambassador, who assumed the source was a CIA agent present at the Communist meeting and asked how accurate the person's recollection was. The Chief of Station answered that the information was completely reliable but there was no one else in the room—avoiding having to say that it was a highly sensitive technical intrusion and letting the ambassador work out the meaning of the reply.

Benghazi has been described as a U.S. consulate, but it was not. It was an information office that had no diplomatic status. There was a small staff of actual State Department information officers plus local translators. The much larger CIA base was located in a separate building a mile away. It was protected by a not completely reliable local militia. Base management would have no say in the movement of the ambassador and would not be party to his plans, nor would it clear its own operations with the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli. In Benghazi, the CIA's operating directive would have been focused on two objectives: monitoring the local al-Qaeda affiliate group, Ansar al-Sharia, and tracking down weapons liberated from Colonel Gaddafi's arsenal. Staff consisted of CIA paramilitaries who were working in cooperation with the local militia. The ambassador would not be privy to operational details and would only know in general what the agency was up to. When the ambassador's party was attacked, the paramilitaries at the CIA base came to the rescue

before being driven back into their own compound, where two officers were subsequently killed in a mortar attack.

Philip Girdali, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest.

The original source of this article is [The American Conservative](#)

Copyright © [Philip Girdali](#), [The American Conservative](#), 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Philip Girdali](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca