

Benghazi: Deception, Denial and Fatal Diplomacy

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Abstract

The present work used operational and intelligence analytical techniques. These analytical techniques focused on the wide range of indicators and warnings surrounding the terrorist attacks in Benghazi on 11-12 September 2012 to answer the question: Were the deaths of four Americans preventable? The objective was to determine: a) the relationships between militias, terrorist organizations and the state's security apparatus; b) the degree of influence with respect to State's official and semi-official organizations in aiding and abetting terrorist organizations; and c) the probability of an alternative outcome to the Benghazi attack. Research included a comprehensive review and analysis of governmental and non-governmental reporting. Research suggested that a dynamic shift in U.S. policy was fatal to the protection and security of U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi.

Keywords: Maghreb, Libya, Terrorism, Shaping Forces, Instability, Implications

Introduction

There is a growing instability across the Islamic Maghreb. This is evidenced by the communiqué published by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) on 18 September 2012 that urged Muslims to emulate the Benghazi assault and to attack U.S. targets in their countries. In light of this communiqué, there is a concern that these regional movements of insecurity were expanding, reaching out and recruiting other militants and terror groups across the Islamic Maghreb (Niedziela & Kirch 2014, 2-3).

Lopez (2014), a member of the Citizens' Commission on Benghazi, explains that the U.S. presence in Libya intended on piloting in a new era for the Libyan people. Ambassador Stevens' role as "point man" for the U.S. intervention in Libya established a conduit for rebel forces to receive U.S. assistance in the form of material, equipment and training for Libyan revolutionary forces; assistance which successfully deposed former Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi on 20 October 2011. Stevens' efforts encompassed relations with multiple official, semi-official and international organizations whose associations, spheres of influence and operational reach were extensive (Lopez 2014, 3).

As a result, underlying relations and intentions masked by deception, denial, and fatal diplomacy ultimately exacted a price on the U.S. mission in Libya, i.e. taking the lives of four Americans as events unfolded in Benghazi. In determining whether the deaths of four Americans were preventable demanded a broader analysis and understanding of the indicators and warnings surrounding the attack. In doing so, this paper analyzed: a) the common operating picture and existential dynamics that affected the revolution; b) forces which shaped the environment; c) drivers of instability; and d) implications which led to the attack.

Common Operating Picture

Regional Overview – the Islamic Maghreb

In general, the Islamic Maghreb remains highly unstable. Two of Libya's neighbors, Egypt and Tunisia, recently underwent dramatic regime changes. Sudan saw the secession of the southern Sudanese region while other parts of the country clamored for independence. Nigeria and Mali suffered civil wars. Chad is poor, corrupt, and plagued by coups and agonized from several dramatic terrorist attacks over the past years. Borders in the Islamic Maghreb are porous. This is in part due to geographic and historical relations amongst tribes, i.e. various tribes maintain economic, social and cultural ties which transcend formal borders. However, the principal problem resides within government, such that inherent governmental weakness in the region remains a catalyst for emergent violence and radicalism across the Islamic Maghreb (Byman 2013, 4).

Not only does instability in one regional state affect its neighbors, but the Islamic Maghreb in general is an exporter of radicalism. For example, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy found that Tunisia and Libya outsourced suicide bombers for the Syrian conflict. Additionally, violence emanates from neighboring countries which permeate the best of government intentions when adopting policies that attempt to strengthen internal security, stability and sovereignty. For instance, as violence erupted in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, similar uprisings fomented throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In Kuwait, nearly 200 anti-American demonstrators converged on the U.S. embassy. Protests formed around other U.S. diplomatic missions in Tunisia, Morocco, and Sudan. This surge of violence underscores the tenuous relationships which often exist between evolving power structures across the Islamic Maghreb such as those demonstrated by the Arab Spring, and successive regime changes in Egypt and Libya (Erickson, Zuckermann & Bucci 2013, 1).

State Overview - Libya

In late 2010, popular uprisings across the Islamic Maghreb, more commonly known as the Arab Spring, emerged in protest to the region's oppressive autocrats. By February 2011, the Arab Spring reached Libya where the opposition sought the removal of its leader Muammar Gadhafi, who had ruled for over 40 years. With support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) "Operation Unified Protector," and the Gulf States, the opposition advanced from Benghazi toward the capital city of Tripoli. On 20 October 2011, rebels captured and killed Muammar Gadhafi outside Gadhafi's hometown of Siirte (Erickson et al. 2013, 3).

Essentially, the inability of Libya's fledgling government to implement law and order contributed to the growing implications of insecurity and instability throughout the region. Considering the violent conditions on the ground, there was evidence of a clear and present security danger directed against U.S. personnel and facilities in Libya, more specifically in Benghazi. Indicators included multiple incidents of armed robberies, attacks on U.S. and international diplomatic personnel and nongovernmental organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Erickson et al. 2013, 4-5). Consequently, on 27 August 2012 the U.S. State Department warned U.S. citizens against visiting Libya and stated that "inter-militia conflict could erupt at any time or any place in the country." Despite the U.S. State Department's warning this threat quickly became reality when armed terrorists descended on the

U.S. Temporary Mission Facility (TMF) in Benghazi. In doing so, the attackers perpetrated an act of terrorism that claimed the lives of four Americans, one of them being the first American Ambassador murdered since 1988 (Blanchard 2012, 2).

As such, terrorist attacks on U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi accentuated the seriousness of the security challenges facing Libya's citizens, newly elected leaders, and U.S. personnel. Armed non-state actors continue to operate in many areas of Libya with impunity (Erikson et al. 2013, 1). Attacks in Libya demonstrate a methodology which indicated basic military command and control, operational coordination and synchronization, material support and funding, intelligence collection, and training capability. The use of RPGs, AK-47s, heavy machine guns, mortars and artillery mounted on trucks were readily available and used. In essence, terrorist groups' simply targeted western nations' assets and resources. As a result, government officials and facilities grew increasingly vulnerable to escalating threats in Benghazi (Niedziela & Kirch 2014, 2).

According to the United Nations Security Council (2013), the power vacuum created as a result of the 2011 Libyan revolution transformed eastern Libya into a serious situation of instability and rising security concerns. Within this vacuum, some armed groups with radical Islamist orientation, transnational linkages and aspirations, and external support established a strong presence, limited popular support notwithstanding. Initially maintaining a discreet profile, these armed groups escalated their attacks against international targets in the Benghazi region. Attempts by the Government to reign in these activities resulted in brazen reprisal killings that targeted official and senior representatives of the international and national government (United Nations Security Council [UNSC]. 2013, 11-12).

Forces Shaping the Environment

Libyan Gendarmerie

Although the Libyan National Army – gendarmerie, was initially controlled by National Transition Council (NTC), the intent was to assure State command and control over armed militias during the post-Gadhafi era. However, many militia groups joined semi-official organizations such as the Libyan Shield Force (LSF), the National Mobile Force (NMF), and the Supreme Security Committee (SSC). In theory, these units, particularly the SSC and the LSF, augmented the gendarmerie. The LSF was considered a reserve unit of the Libyan National Army and received financial resource allocation from the NTC's budget. The LSF comprised four brigades in eastern, central, south and western Libya. The LSF administered the rule of law and performed combat tasks. The autonomy with which the LSF operated strained relations among other militias and the fledgling Libyan government (Finucci 2014, 2-7). In reality, these semi-official organizations operated with a high degree of autonomy (Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium [TRAC]. 2014, 1).

Additionally, in September 2012 Libya's gendarmerie formed the National Mobile Force (NMF), a unit of the Libyan National Army, with the responsibility of disbanding "illegal" militias in Benghazi. The NMF comprised the Zawiya Martyrs Brigade, a militia, with members assigned to the Special Forces unit (al-Saiqa), the Military Police and the Intelligence Service. The NMF of Benghazi was responsible for disbanding all "illegal" or unlicensed armed groups and took control of previously seized State's property and installations within Libya (Global Security Organization 2013, 1).

Benghazi

Also, as part of the overall State's security apparatus, was the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG), one of the more supported militia forces of Libya. PFG popular support was due to the aggressive lobbying by local and foreign investors for Libyan petroleum. Control of the petroleum facilities was pivotal in maintaining a balance of regional power as demonstrated by the acquisition of a regional oil company by militias in Cyrenaica. This acquisition was pivotal because militias eventually controlled a quarter of the State's petroleum industry previously held by Ibrahim Jadhran's, Cyrenaican Political Bureau (Finucci 2014, 8).

Essentially, these semi-official and transitory militia organizations advocated varying degrees of ideological and political agendas while others pursued more individualistic, and criminal intent. This phenomenon was evidenced in May 2013 siege of government ministries by elements of the SSC and the LSF. The siege resulted from collaborative efforts among different security entities and regional brigades for a common political goal. This action placed competing organizations at odds with one another while intensifying persistent volatility, and further destabilizing an already tenuous security situation (Wehrey 2013, 1).

Libyan Militias

In general, the NTC - Ministry of Interior (MoI) assumed command and control over the six major post-revolutionary militias within Libya. Militias' areas of operation were primarily centered on the major population centers of Tripoli and Benghazi with a combined population of approximately 2.7 million people. Altogether, militias accounted for approximately 150,000 fighters with an estimated 5,000 additional terrorists who had infiltrated the Libyan state and security apparatuses through al-Qaeda factions in Libya (Finucci 2014, 8-10).

Finucci (2014) defines the militias which operated predominantly in Tripoli as: the Al-Zintan Revolutionaries' Council, Al-Qaqaaa Brigade, Al-Sawaiq Brigade and the Misrata Brigades, a.k.a. the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries. The Zintan Military Council (ZMC) controlled some of the most powerful militias in Tripoli. The ZMC once controlled important facilities in Libya, such as the Tripoli International Airport, which was managed by ZMC until 20 April 2012. The Al-Qaqaa Brigade was considered one of the most powerful Islamist brigades in Libya, and was closely associated with Mahmud Jabril, leader of the progressive National Forces Alliance (NFA) party of the NTC. The Al-Sawaiq Brigade which was based in western Libya, and took part in the assault on Tripoli in September 2011, was rapidly incorporated into the Libyan National Army. Once evaluated as a disciplined militia and incorporated into the army, the brigade assumed security for the French embassy in Tripoli. The Misrata Brigades, a.k.a. the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries (MUR), was instituted in November 2011, and registered 236 militias. The MUR is categorized as a "revolutionary militia" by the Small Arms Survey. Brigades of the MUR gained power in Misrata by requisitioning and distributing 40,000 weapons stockpiled between Tripoli and Siirte (Finucci 2014, 8-10).

Additionally, militias which operated predominantly in Benghazi were defined as: the 17 February Martyrs Brigade which was one of the best armed militias in eastern Libya. The 17 February Martyrs Brigade owned light and heavy weapons, as well as training facilities. Additionally, one of two factions which splintered from the 17 February Martyrs Brigade was known as the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade, a jihadist group settled in Benghazi. Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade operated in eastern Libya and Kufra, and was officially integrated into the Libyan National Army. The Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade was considered one of the three most powerful militias in eastern Libya. Additionally, Ansar al-Sharia, a listed terrorist organization by the

United Nations and United States, was also a known splinter faction of the 17 February Martyrs Brigade. Although these two splintered factions emanated from 17 February Martyrs Brigade, friction purportedly existed (Finucci 2014, 8-10). In short, Carter (2013) noted that local government authorities were suspicious of the 17 February Martyrs Brigade and leader, Fawzi Bukatef, a member of Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. Essentially, the 17 February Martyrs Brigade was sympathetic of al-Qaeda, and potentially managed an arrangement with the CIA behind U.S. State Department cover engaging in security for the U.S. TMF in Benghazi (Carter 2013, 3b).

Terrorist Organizations

The various terror organizations in the Maghreb were divided, but not necessarily hostile to one another. Many were linked in one way or another to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) whose key leaders are Algerian, but whose membership included a wider range of individuals from the surrounding region (Niedziela & Kirch 2014, 2). Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, formerly known as the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) on 27 March 2002 by the U.S. Department of State. AQIM remains largely a regionally focused terrorist group. AQIM espouses a more rhetorical anti-Western ideology and aspires to overthrow “apostate” Africa regimes while creating and Islamic Caliphate (U.S. Department of State 2014, 310-311). As Such, Libya was ripe for foreign and homegrown terrorist penetration. The al-Qaeda core had long included Libyans within the ranks and reportedly dispatched operatives to build an organization in the post-Gadhafi era. Homegrown terrorist groups like Ansar Al-Sharia (AAS) and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) had ample opportunity and area to operate within Libya (Byman 2013, 4).

In 2011 and 2012, AQIM took advantage of the deteriorating security situation across Tunisia, Libya, and Mali to plan and conduct expanded operations. Those operations included AQIM involvement in the 11-12 September attacks on U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi. In addition to conducting attacks, AQIM also conducts continual kidnap for ransom operations. The targets are usually Westerners from governments or third parties that establish a pattern of making concessions in the form of ransom payments for the release of individuals in custody. Additional financial and logistical support is provided to AQIM through Western Europe (U.S. Department of State 2014, 306-307).

The Ansar al-Sharia’ (AAS) of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), a designated FTO that represents a rebranding effort, is designed to attract potential followers in areas under AQAP’s control. The leaders of Benghazi’s AAS faction, specifically Sheikh Muhammad al-Zahawi, spent years in Gadhafi’s prisons. Additionally, the AAS group of Darnah in eastern Libya was led by former Guantánamo detainee Abu Sufian bin Qumu. Although neither group purportedly advocated violent actions against the post-revolutionary Libyan state the fact remains, that AAS of Benghazi returned, and provided security at hospitals and government facilities even after involvement in the 11-12 September attacks in Benghazi (Malka & Lawrence 2013, 6).

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) is also designated a FTO as of 17 December 2004. In the early 1990s, LIFG emerged from a group of Libyans who had fought Soviet forces in Afghanistan and pledged to overthrow Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi. In the following years, some members maintained an anti-Gadhafi focus and targeted Libyan government interest. Others, such as Abu al-Faraj al-Libi, who was arrested in Pakistan in 2005, aligned with Osama

bin Laden, and purportedly was part of the al-Qaeda leadership structure. On 3 November 2007, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri announced a formal merger between AQ and LIFG (U.S. Department of State 2014, 296-297).

As such, AAS and the LIFG share similar aspects of al-Qaeda ideology, but are not formally affiliated and generally maintained a local focus. In Libya, the terrorist threat to Western and Libyan government interests remained strong, especially in the eastern part of the country, e.g. Benghazi, where these FTOs predominantly operated. Libya's porous borders, the weakness of Libya's nascent security institutions, and large amounts of loose small arms created opportunities for homegrown jihadists such as AAS and LIFG to operate with impunity (Rossomando 2012, 1a).

Drivers of Instability

Weapons Proliferation

During the 2011 Libyan revolution, Gadhafi's arms warehouses were bombed and looted and the contents proliferated throughout the region. Tanks, machine guns, mortars, small arms, explosives, rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), anti-aircraft guns and man-portable (MANPAD) surface-to-air missiles, which reportedly numbered upwards of 20,000 in Gadhafi's arsenal, were just a few of the thousands of weapons under reclamation by authorities. While the United States, NATO allies, and Libyan authorities had limited success in tracking down some munitions, large numbers remained unaccounted for, notably an estimated 5,000 MANPAD surface-to-air missiles, i.e. missiles which are capable of targeting a commercial airliner (Erickson et al. 2013, 4-5).

Additionally, Libya's stockpile of declared chemical weapons, precursor and nuclear material also remains the subject of scrutiny. During the 2011 revolution, U.S. officials believed that remaining precursor material and chemicals for sulfur and mustard gas were secured. Due to the non-weaponized nature of the declared sulfur mustard agent and other precursor material suggested that such chemicals and precursor material posed a minimal threat. Libya's nuclear material is also subject to international and U.S. scrutiny, and entailed a joint operation that removed highly enriched uranium and other proliferation-sensitive items. Libya also stockpiled several hundred tons of uranium oxide yellowcake, reportedly near Sabha (Blanchard 2012, 21).

Proliferated weapons benefited terrorist organizations and affiliates such as AQIM, the terrorist group's main North African franchise, which obtained weapons from the vast caches of deposited Libyan dictator Gadhafi. A statement by AQIM leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar reinforced concerns regarding lost Libyan arms ending up in terrorist hands, and underlined questions about the Islamist wing of the Libyan revolution. AQIM's Belmokhtar stated that "We [al-Qaida] are one of the main benefactors of the revolutions in the Arab world. As for our requisition of Libyan armament, that is an absolutely natural thing." AQIM purportedly acquired MANPAD surface-to-air missiles as part of the requisition (Rossomando 2012, 1a).

According to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the increased availability of weapons empowered a variety of non-State actors in conflict with national authorities. Of particular concern was franchised terrorist organizations such as AAS, and the homegrown LIFG being the best financed among those non-State actors. Such non-State actors were well positioned to purchase large quantities and varieties of weapons, thereby strengthening their

position. As a result, increased cooperation among FTOs remains a trend across the Islamic Maghreb, more specifically Libya (UNSC 2013, 12).

Trafficking

Libya's vast territory and thousands of miles of uncontrolled desert border continues to present a massive security challenge for the newly formed Libyan government. Border security at Libya's airports is minimal, with no collection of passenger records, biometric screenings, or travel document verification. At border control points, border security is provided by poorly trained, underpaid, and ill-equipped government border guards or by local brigades or tribes with tenuous loyalties to the State, and often involved in illicit cross-border trade. Hence, there is a considerable illicit flow of goods, people, and weapons across Libya's borders. This illicit flow is evidenced by the many refugees sailing from the shores of Libya, by foreign fighters coming to train in Libya, and by the vast number of illicit weapons that transit Libya for the Maghreb, and beyond (U.S. Department of State 2014, 160).

Transfers of military materiel were organized from various locations in Libya, which included Misrata and Benghazi. The significant size of some shipments and the logistics involved suggests that representatives of Libyan local authorities were complicit in the transfers of military materials, and possibly directly involved. Trafficking patterns from Libya included transfers by land along the northern coastal area, and also across Libya's southern borders. Trafficking was also conducted by boat, primarily from Benghazi and Tobruk in Libya. Traffickers identified by regional security sources included Libyan, Egyptian and, possibly, Palestinian nationals (UNSC 2013, 34).

For example, the UNSC reported that on 27 April 2012 Lebanese authorities seized a shipment of arms and ammunition on board the *Letfallah II* near Tripoli, Lebanon. The materiel purportedly originated from Libya and was in three containers. Reporting further claimed that the materiel was destined for opposition forces in the Syrian Arab Republic. Again in September 2012, a Libyan fishing ship, the *Al Ensitar*, carried the largest consignment of weapons for the Syrian Arab Republic since the uprising, and docked in Turkey where 400 tons of materiel was transferred to the Syrian opposition. According to Turkish authorities, the *Al Entisar* is registered in Libya, and sailed from Benghazi to Iskenderun, Turkey where it docked on 25 August 2012 and subsequently returned to Benghazi on 3 September 2012 (UNSC 2013, 38-39).

Carter (2014) underscores that al-Qaeda sympathizers and operatives were directly woven into the fabric of Libyan revolutionary fighters. Weapons shipments originating from the Persian Gulf destined for Libya landed in the hands of terrorists and other non-state actors. Arsenal continued to remain under the control of non-state actors. The Libyan gendarmerie retained a very limited capacity to control the illicit entry and exit of materials, weapons and fighters along Libya's borders, ports and airports. Such conditions contributed to the overall insecurity of the surrounding region, especially within Libya (Carter 2014, 1). The UNSC asserted that delays in disarmament and weapons collections encouraged illicit trading, and generated considerable money-making opportunities for traffickers. While small quantities of weapons or ammunition were sold by individuals, larger transfers required the involvement of armed groups that controlled the stockpiles, and on occasion, the consent of authorities (UNSC 2013, 25).

Funding

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Libyan International Contact Group provided monetary support to the rebels to counter Gadhafi's forces during the revolution. In Rome, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said the creation of a new financial mechanism "permitted funds to be channeled effectively and transparently" to the rebels. The move followed an urgent request from the rebels, based in the eastern city of Benghazi. The rebels' NTC required upwards of USD \$3 billion for military salaries, food, medicine and other basic supplies. British Foreign Secretary William Hague insisted that any financial assistance to the rebels would not be spent on weapons (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC]. 2011, 1).

In fact, the United Kingdom had already provided USD \$21.5 million in aid to the rebels. Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton negotiated the freeing up of more than USD \$30 billion frozen in Libyan assets. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted that the U.S. government wanted access to those assets owned by Gadhafi, and the Libyan government in the United States. Secretary Clinton also noted that these funds were available in assisting the Libyan people. The U.S. had previously pledged USD \$53 million in humanitarian aid, and authorized upwards of another USD \$25 million in assistance to the rebels. Assistance included medical supplies, boots, tents, rations and personal protective gear (BBC 2011, 1).

In all, U.S. assistance programmed for Libyan rebels exceeded USD \$133 million over the course of three years. The breakdown for expenditures included lethal and non-lethal aid to the sums of: FY 2011 – USD \$132 million appropriated funding, FY 2012 – USD \$24.9 million requested funding, and in FY 2013 – USD \$1.45 million in estimated funding to Libya. U.S. officials argued that the rebels' most pressing needs were command and control, communications, training, organization, and logistical support (Blanchard 2012, 12).

The Citizens' Commission on Benghazi reported that after the defeat of Gadhafi's regime, a delegation from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) traveled to Libya to collect payment for weapons financed by the UAE, and delivered by Qatar to the NTC during the revolution. The UAE delegation sought USD \$1 billion owed as part of a prior transaction. During visits to Tripoli, UAE officials discovered that half of the USD \$1 billion of weapons financed for the rebels was diverted by Mustafa Abdul Jalil, head of the Muslim Brotherhood's party of the Libyan NTC. Diverted weapons were sold to Gadhafi. Furthermore, Jalil learned of Major General Abdel Fatah Younis' defection to rebel forces in February 2011, and was aware of the diverted weapons to Gadhafi's forces. As a result, Jalil ordered the killing of Younis by Abu Salim Khattala in July 2011. Khattala was later identified as the commander of AAS who led the Benghazi attack in September 2012 (Citizens Commission on Benghazi [CCB]. 2014, 5).

As a consequence, upwards of USD \$500 million of weapons intended for Libyan rebel fighters ended up in the hands of terrorists since the country's uprising began in 2011. Those weapons, provided to rebels with tacit approval by the United States during the 2011 Libyan revolution, ended up in the hands of al-Qaeda linked militants and may have played a role in the deadly Benghazi attack on 11-12 September 2013 (Carter 2014, 1b).

Implications

Diplomatic and Political

The NTC suffered from political discord. Discord was prevalent mainly between the key political parties, the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Justice and Construction Party (JCP), and the more liberal leaning National Forces Alliance (NFA). Resignation by Congressional members was also prevalent. The enactment of a wide sweeping lustration law prevented some cabinet members from holding office due to prior tenures under the former Gadhafi regime (Human Rights Watch [HRW]. 2013, 1).

During January 2012, public gatherings in the low thousands emerged in Benghazi, and Misrata to demand that Sharia be codified and enforced as the primary component of Libya's new constitution. Salafists such as Ansar al-Sharia (AAS) who supported that position gained momentum, and continued organizing broader public activism. Muslim Brotherhood leaders directed a "calling for the establishment of a civilian state, but with an Islamic reference." Officials believed the Muslim Brotherhood was attempting to take advantage of a situation repeated in both Tunisia and Egypt whereby the Muslim Brotherhood was an active member of the revolution and seized power as a result. As Libya attempted to create a new order in their fractured country, many now believed that the Qatari regime's Salafist sympathizers contributed to the growing influence of radical Islamism in Libya. Qatar, a close ally of the U.S., was the main conduit through which weapons transfers were made to Libyan rebels, and eventually led to the deposing of long-time dictator Gadhafi. The cost of liberation from Gadhafi dictatorship had exacted a price as noted by former NTC Deputy Prime Minister Ali Tarhouni (Alster 2013, 1-3).

Alster (2013) quoted Tarhouni as saying:

Qatar provided a narrow clique of Islamists with arms and money, giving them great leverage over the political process. What Qatar had done was basically support the Muslim Brotherhood. They have brought armament and given them to people we don't know. (Alster, 2013, p. 3)

Patrick Haimzadeh, a former French diplomat previously stationed in Tripoli from 2001 to 2004, illustrated that evidence pointed to prior collusion between AAS, the perpetrators of the Benghazi attack, and the Katiba Deraa Libya or "Libya Shield Force," the most powerful of the government-sponsored militias that emerged from the 2011 Libyan revolution. Essentially, Haimzadeh accused Western powers of "opening Pandora's box." In doing so, Western powers armed militias during the 2011 Libyan revolution. Given the dependence of the Libyan government upon the militias, and the presence of radical Salafists within the interior of the official security apparatus, the situation remained doubtful that the Libyan NTC was capable of taking steps against radical Salafist militias in Libya (Rosenthal 2012, 2).

Military and Security

In Libya, a lack of countrywide security coverage contributed to a high threat environment. Libya's security situation worsened exponentially. The central government struggled, despite new integrated initiatives, to control the country's numerous militias, whose accumulated size and firepower vastly exceeded those of the national gendarmerie. The interim government failed to control the deteriorating security situation in Libya, especially in the capital city of Tripoli, and in Benghazi. The government failed to demobilize anti-Gadhafi militias or merge fighters into government forces with proper vetting procedures. Both the government and militia groups created numerous hybridized security entities such as the Supreme Security

Benghazi

Committee (SSC), and the Libyan Shield Force (LSF), which operated with unclear lines of authority, tenuous loyalty, and a tendency toward infighting (Wehrey 2013, 1). HRW (2013) reported that government authorities “contracted” militias, comprised of former rebel fighters with radical leaning tendencies to assist in restoring order in lieu of prioritizing the establishment of a national gendarmerie. These militias, which included the LSF and the SSC, operated under the Army Chief of Staff and Ministry of Interior respectively and often paralleled the State’s security apparatus (HRW 2013, 2).

Security for the U.S. Temporary Mission Facility (TMF) in Benghazi was “contracted” to a company known as Blue Mountain Group (BMG). BMG hired locals to fulfill security requirements at the TMF. U.S. officials noted that the contract was largely based on expediency because of the uncertainty in contract duration. Security practices at the TMF, where BMG guards patrolled with flashlights and batons instead of guns, remains under U.S. government scrutiny. Federal contract data showed that the Benghazi security contract, worth up to \$783,284, was listed as a “miscellaneous” award, and not part of the larger master State Department contract that specifically covered diplomatic security for overseas embassies. In a 9 July 2012 memo approved by Stevens, Regional Security Officer (RSO) Nordstrom expressed hopes of shoring up defenses at U.S. facilities in Libya, and considered partial arming of some local guard supervisors. But Nordstrom described difficulties getting local gun permits, noting a lag of up to 60 days for “selection, training, equipping, policy approvals and deployment” of armed guards (Zakaria & Cornwell 2012, 1-5).

As violence increased, U.S. personnel in Libya repeatedly requested additional security from the U.S. Department of State. These requests came in the form of emails, phone conversations, and official cables between Tripoli and Washington. Yet, in the days and months before the attacks, the U.S. Department of State withdrew two Diplomatic Security (DS) mobile security detachments, and a U.S. military Security Support Team (SST). The U.S. Department of State believed that these duties were replaceable by a combined force of local guard hires and DS agents only. The patchwork guard force in Benghazi included an unarmed perimeter patrol and four armed members of a local militia from the 17 February Martyrs Brigade. Despite the increasing dangers in Libya, U.S. Department of State officials in Washington denied the requests for increased security from U.S. on-ground personnel (House foreign Affairs Committee [HFAC]. 2013, 7).

For example, on 3 May 2012 Under Secretary Kennedy terminated U.S. Embassy Tripoli’s use of a DC-3 aircraft that provided logistical support to the SST, and was vital in moving sensitive personnel and equipment to and from Benghazi and Tripoli according to the HFAC. In July 2012, the U.S. Department of State rejected further assistance of the U.S. military’s SST which was integral to the overall security mission of U.S. personnel in Libya. The SST was created to meet the demanding security challenges facing the U.S. Department of State, and their requirement to re-establish diplomatic relations with a post-Gadhafi Libya. Instead, the U.S. Department of State insisted on aggressively reducing security and associated support in Libya. A decision which disregarded numerous indicators and warnings that additional assistance was urgent and necessary for the continued security of U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi (HFAC 2013, 12).

By comparison, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) increased security at its nearby annex, the Special Mission Compound, in response to the same deteriorating security situation. According to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the CIA quickly implemented additional security measures due to threats of continuing attacks against Western personnel and

facilities in Benghazi. The CIA's approach stood in stark contrast to that of the U.S. Department of State's, and further highlighted the lack of responsiveness to a rapidly deteriorating security situation, and subsequent requests for additional assistance by RSO Nordstrom (HFAC 2013, 8).

Intelligence Information

U.S. intelligence agencies provided extensive warning of the deteriorating security situation in eastern Libya, and included al-Qaeda's expanded operations and the mounting risk to U.S. personnel and facilities. These threats were well-understood by even the most senior officials in Washington, i.e. then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was well aware of the situation, and that terrorist organizations that claimed affiliation with al-Qaeda were active in the area (HFAC 2013, 1). To further exacerbate the situation, evidence pointed to the LSF as an accomplice for al-Qaeda infiltration of Libya, i.e. the same LSF which purportedly provided support to a Marine detachment dispatched to Benghazi on the night of attack (Rosenthal 2012, 2).

Western intelligence officials were also concerned that al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) affiliate Ansar al-Sharia (AAS) of Libya was "seeking revenge for the drone strike that killed prominent leader Abu Yahya al-Libi" on 4 June 2012. AAS of Libya included a deadly mix of the 17 February Martyrs Brigade, and was considered the biggest and best-armed militia in the country. The brigade was rife with radicals that worked closely with "Abu Ahmed Khattalah's brigade" - AAS of Benghazi. Purportedly, Blue Mountain Group (BMG), the security company hired by the U.S. Department of State to provide security for the U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi, had in fact hired rebels directly connected with AQIM through the 17 February Martyrs Brigade (Carter 2014, 2a).

Additionally, remnants of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) were circulating in Benghazi, and purportedly linked to the larger AQIM. The LIFG consisted of Islamic militants who escaped prison during the initial days of the 2011 Libyan revolution (Rossomando 2011, 1). Those identified jihadists and AQ core affiliates were well known to the U.S. Intelligence Community, U.S. Department of State, and Tripoli Embassy long before the 2011 Libyan revolution. As with other AQ branches, the Libyan affiliated LIFG originated from the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. Some of those jihadists like Abu Anas al-Libi and Abdelhakim Belhadj were prominent in the 2011 Libyan revolution (Gabbay 2012, 2). Carter (2014) indicates a possible motive which led senior administration officials to cover up these circumstances surrounding Stevens, and how the Libyan rebels were infiltrated by AQ core affiliates from the onset of the revolution (Carter 2014, 3a).

A bipartisan report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence revealed the depth and breadth of what U.S. intelligence agencies knew. This report found that agencies produced hundreds of analytic reports warning that militias, terrorist and affiliated groups had the capability and intent to strike U.S. and Western facilities and personnel in Libya. A June 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report entitled Libya: Terrorists Now Targeting U.S. and Western Interests anticipated —more anti-U.S. terrorist attacks in eastern Libya, underscored the elevated threats to U.S. personnel and facilities in Libya (HFAC 2013, 1).

Analysis

Forces Shaping the Environment

The Libyan gendarmerie and security apparatus maintained a secondary role to the semi-official paramilitary and terrorist organizations in Libya. Infiltration of the Libyan gendarmerie and security apparatus by AQ core affiliates was facilitated through underlying internal affairs, influence and operational methods collaborated between the 17 February Martyrs Brigade, and associated terrorist organizations such as Ansar al-Sharia and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (Rosenthal 2012, 2). Local government authorities long suspected the 17 February Martyrs Brigade and leader, Fawzi Bukatef, a member of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood of undue influence on Libyan political and terrorist activities (Alster 2013, 2-3). Simply put, the 17 February Martyrs Brigade brokered access to the U.S. Temporary Mission Facility (TMF) in Benghazi. This arrangement concealed the underlying intentions of the 17 February Martyrs Brigade which engaged in security for U.S. personnel at the Temporary Mission Facility in Benghazi. In short, an AQ deception plan facilitated by the 17 February Martyrs Brigade resulted in a successful infiltration of the U.S. TMF. AQ sympathizers and operatives were directly and intentionally woven into the fabric of Libyan revolutionary fighters as part of a larger deception operation conducted by AQ core affiliates. Essentially, Ansar al-Sharia's and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's infiltration amounted to a larger, coordinated deception plan orchestrated by AQIM; a deception operation specifically targeting Western and Libyan interests in eastern Libya.

Drivers of Instability

An increased availability of weapons empowered a variety of non-State actors who were in conflict with Libyan national authorities. Of particular concern were franchised terrorist organizations operating in Benghazi, such as Ansar al-Sharia, and the homegrown jihadist Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which represented the best financed among non-State actors. As a result, weapons shipments that originated from the Persian Gulf, e.g. Qatar, and destined for Libya, landed in the hands of such terrorist organizations (UNSC 2013, 15-16). Upwards of USD \$500 million worth of weapons intended for Libyan rebel fighters ended up in the hands of terrorist organizations since the country's uprising began in 2011. As a result, arsenals remain under the control of well positioned militant and terrorist organizations throughout Libya. This situation effectively disrupted the successful transition of power into the hands of the Libyan National Transition Council. Consequently, the continued transfer of weapons to militant and terrorist organizations curtailed the establishment of Libya's security, stability, governance and rule of law. In the end, weapons provided to rebel fighters during the 2011 Libyan revolution, ended up in the hands of AQ core affiliates, and likely played a role in the deadly Benghazi attack (Carter 2014, 1b).

Implications

U.S. intelligence agencies were well aware and provided extensive warnings of the deteriorating security situation in eastern Libya. These warnings included AQ's expanded operations and the mounting risk to U.S. personnel and facilities. Having ultimately armed AQ

linked terrorist organizations such as Ansar al-Sharia and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Western powers expedited the imbalance of power between Libyan power brokers. This imbalance of power simply emboldened AQ linked terrorist organizations to conduct more brazen and frequented attacks against Western interests. More notably, the imbalance of power tilted the scale in favor of radical Salafism at the hands of AQ, and the Muslim Brotherhood's planned seizure of power (Gabbay 2012, 2).

Despite the rising threat, requests for additional security measures from U.S. personnel on the ground were denied by the U.S. Department of State's leadership. Instead, the U.S. Department of State officials withdrew two Diplomatic Security (DS) mobile security detachments, a U.S. military Security Support Team (SST), and canceled the use of a DC-3 transport plane. An critical asset which shuttled vital logistical and personnel between mission sites in Tripoli and Benghazi (HFAC 2013, 12). Consequently, U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi were isolated, and reliant on limited immediate protective measures without an external rapid response mechanism to intervene during a crisis situation. In effect, exposure and risk to U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi increased exponentially as a result of the U.S. Department of State's cancellation of critical mission support assets.

Conclusion

In concluding, the dynamic shift in U.S. foreign policy was fatal to the security of U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi. Essentially, political expediency facilitated access to, and material support for known terrorist organizations such as Ansar al-Sharia and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. This policy of political expediency and indifference dictated the actions which led to the eventual murder of four Americans. As such, the aiding and abetting of al-Qaeda linked terrorist organizations, tacitly or otherwise, was symptomatic of a culture of indifference within the U.S. Department of State's senior leadership. This culture of indifference placed the security of U.S. personnel and facilities second to that of the U.S. Department of State's agenda for normalized Libyan relations; an agenda which turned a blind eye to "red flag" warnings and signs of escalating threats. Red flag warnings which likely indicated a deadly deception plan by al-Qaeda operatives working under the cover of the 17 February Martyrs Brigade.

Simply put, the U.S. Department of State's culture of indifference amounted to a reckless disregard of duty; a failure by senior leadership to bolster security as repeatedly requested by in-country personnel. A reckless disregard to provide support as clearly articulated, defined and substantiated by the Intelligence Community and on-ground personnel. Essentially, this fatal shift in foreign policy left U.S. personnel and facilities exposed to undue risk in Benghazi. Consequently, a combination of denial, deception and fatal diplomacy positioned the U.S. government on the wrong side of the war on terror in Libya. The results of an al-Qaeda fabricated deception plan, the denial of a rapidly deteriorating security situation, and a fatal shift in U.S. diplomacy likely underwrote the attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities in Benghazi on 11-12 September 2012. An attack that was almost certainly preventable.

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Benghazi

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