

POKING OUR EYES OUT IN LIBYA

The NYT reports that—as already happened in Lebanon and Iran in the last year or so—the attack on the Consulate in Benghazi seriously set back CIA’s intelligence gathering efforts in Libya.

“It’s a catastrophic intelligence loss,” said one American official who has served in Libya and who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the F.B.I. is still investigating the attack. “We got our eyes poked out.”

Curiously, the article doesn’t mention anything about my current obsession about the attack, the reports that attackers took away documents from the embassy listing those cooperating with our intelligence (as well as describing oil negotiations). If the attackers walked away with a CIA location’s files, of course the CIA’s HUMINT network and SIGINT efforts would be compromised; the attackers would have a road map of what the CIA was doing!

Instead, the article uses the number of spooks evacuated from Benghazi as an indication of how much intelligence work was going on.

Among the more than two dozen American personnel evacuated from the city after the assault on the American mission and a nearby annex were about a dozen C.I.A. operatives and contractors, who played a crucial role in conducting surveillance and collecting information on an array of armed militant groups in and around the city.

Remember, when rescuers showed up at a safe house after the attack, they expected 10 people; they weren’t prepared for the 37 they found, which made the ambush on the safe house more

difficult to fight.

But he had a transport problem. Having been told to expect 10 Americans and having found 37, Obeidi did not have enough vehicles to break out, despite having one heavy anti-aircraft gun mounted on a pickup truck.

"I was being bombarded by calls from all over the country by Libyan government officials who wanted me to hurry and get them out," he said. "But I told them that we were in such difficult circumstances and that I needed more men and more cars."

Eventually dozens more vehicles were dispatched from pro-government militia brigades and, with the sun rising, the convoy headed back to the airport where an aircraft flew a first group of U.S. personnel out to the Libyan capital.

Though I'm wondering whether at least some of the 37 were DIA, since right after this happened, DOD announced it would hire contractors—including Blackwater—to train DIA personnel deploying overseas.

In any case, the number of people evacuated must have led to the discovery that many the people working at the Consulate were working off the books, because in addition to the Libyan Special Forces partnering with us to protect the Consulate, the number was also a surprise to Libya's Deputy Prime Minister.

Though the agency has been cooperating with the new post-Qaddafi Libyan intelligence service, the size of the C.I.A.'s presence in Benghazi apparently surprised some Libyan leaders. The deputy prime minister, Mustafa Abushagour, was quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* last week saying that he learned about some of the delicate American operations in Benghazi only

after the attack on the mission, in large part because a surprisingly large number of Americans showed up at the Benghazi airport to be evacuated.

"We have no problem with intelligence sharing or gathering, but our sovereignty is also key," said Mr. Abushagour.

Ah sovereignty. That pesky issue keeps biting us in the ass with our so-called allies.

All of this is not to ignore the really big news from Libya over the weekend: the large protests against militias in the city, which the Administration is hailing as proof of the democratic instincts of the Libans. Though I suspect we'll learn this was more about Libyan counter-offensive (possibly with US assistance) than just spontaneous protests (that is, as the original attack used cover of a protest, I suspect this counter-offensive did too).

But the subtext of this NYT story seems to be that we had a bunch of CIA guys working in two undefended locations-purportedly "safe houses" that the attackers knew enough about to deploy mortars to attack them. And that leaving the spooks like sitting ducks rather unsurprisingly led to the attackers compromising all their intelligence-gathering going on in Benghazi.