

# ANOTHER SEQUEL IN THE LIBYAN LEFT BEHIND SERIES

A month ago, I marveled at the remarkable frequency with which interesting documents have a way of appearing in Libya; I dubbed it the “Libyan Left Behind” syndrome.

It has happened again. Yet more journalists—Harald Doornbos and Jenan Moussa, writing for Foreign Policy—has found newsworthy documents at the abandoned (and unsecured) mission in Benghazi. These suggest that elements from Benghazi’s police force may have helped plan the attack. One letter informed the Libyan Foreign Affairs office that a member of the police force had been surveilling the compound the morning of the attack, and that the police had not provided increased security requested for Ambassador Stevens’ visit.

One letter, written on Sept. 11 and addressed to Mohamed Obeidi, the head of the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ office in Benghazi, reads:

“Finally, early this morning at 0643, September 11, 2012, one of our diligent guards made a troubling report. Near our main gate, a member of the police force was seen in the upper level of a building across from our compound. It is reported that this person was photographing the inside of the U.S. special mission and furthermore that this person was part of the police unit sent to protect the mission. The police car stationed where this event occurred was number 322.”

[snip]

The document also suggests that the U.S. consulate had asked Libyan authorities on Sept. 9 for extra security measures

in preparation for Stevens' visit, but that the Libyans had failed to provide promised support.

"On Sunday, September 9, 2012, the U.S. mission requested additional police support at our compound for the duration of U.S. ambassador Chris Stevens' visit. We requested daily, twenty-four hour police protection at the front and rear of the U.S. mission as well as a roving patrol. In addition we requested the services of a police explosive detection dog," the letter reads.

"We were given assurances from the highest authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that all due support would be provided for Ambassador Stevens' visit to Benghazi. However, we are saddened to report that we have only received an occasional police presence at our main gate. Many hours pass when we have no police support at all."

Another letter—addressed to Benghazi's police chief, Brigadier Hussain Abu Hmeidah—asked the police directly to look into the surveillance. The government in Tripoli purportedly fired Abu Hmeidah after the attack, but he has refused to leave and no one has forced him to.

Note, FP's journalists found the documents in the mission's Tactical Operations Center, which (according to State's Deputy Assistant Secretary Charlene Lamb, though she's definitely one of the people whose job is at risk here), was not breached during the attack.

They attempted to break into the Tactical Operations Center again and again but were not able to breach the facility.

Presumably—particularly given assurances no classified information was compromised—the security officers destroyed anything

particularly sensitive in the TOC before leaving the mission (though these were only draft documents).

As I said, these letters suggest that the police were in on the attack. I'm particularly struck by how unconvincing implicated Libyans' responses to FP's questions about the letter are.

Obeidi, the Libyan official named on one of the printouts, said he had not received any such letter, adding, "I did not even know that the U.S. ambassador was visiting Benghazi." However, a spokesman for the Benghazi police confirmed that the ministry had notified the police of the ambassador's visit. "We did not receive that letter from the U.S. consulate. We received a letter from Ministry of Foreign Affairs Benghazi asking for additional security measures around consulate during visit of the ambassador. And the police provided all extra security which was asked for," the spokesman said.

Obeidi seems to be denying he received the September 11 letter. The police also deny receiving any September 11 letter. They do say they got an (presumably) earlier letter from the Foreign Affairs office directing them to provide more security. This would seem to refute Obeidi's claim that he didn't know Stevens was in Benghazi that week, as would the September 11 letter's mention of "assurances from the highest authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" that the support would be provided. But the police also don't specify how much security they had been asked to provide.

In other words, it stinks. It sounds like Obeidi, at least, is not being straight about what he knew.

Now add these details to a story from Monday, adding other details that support this was an

inside job. The story has a number of details I hope to return to (including pointing to some discrepancies between the story the Americans have been telling and the Libyans). The story also reveals that several cars followed the February 17 militia members who picked up American reinforcements at the Benghazi airport.

[A militia member the article refers to by the pseudonym Ibn Febrayir] was ordered to the Benghazi airport to pick up a group of about a dozen flying in from Tripoli and to accompany them to the Benghazi Medical Center. He wasn't informed about their identities and only discovered they were Americans when he arrived at the airport with five white Toyota pickups and 20 men. Two large armored SUVs with darkened windows eventually pulled out from the runway and he was ordered by radio to follow. Behind him were two cars full of men from the Libyan Shield, a militia-based force that reports to Libya's defense ministry. He noticed two Chevy cars also left the airport with them. He never found out who they were, and they worried him over the next few hours.

The Americans tried to get the Libyans to allow them to proceed on their own (presumably hoping to lose the trackers), but ultimately acquiesced. Then the cars following—including the Libyan Shield members, who were supposed to be “approved militia” disappeared.

“Before we even showed up [to the annex] they were there waiting,” Febrayir says. He remains convinced that the security for the rescue was compromised and that attackers were not only eavesdropping on radio chatter but were fed by someone from inside the operations room. He never found out who was exactly in the Chevys. They sped off—as did the two Libyan Shield cars. He never saw them again.

The two stories together, then, seem to suggest that people within the “approved militia” tasked with providing security were helping the attackers. We have a hint of who that might be. Recall the WaPo report that the Americans resisted the assistance of the Rafallah al-Sehati Brigade the night of the attack. Recall that Muhammad al-Gharabi, Commander of Rafallah al-Sehati Brigade and Libya Shield 2, met with Americans in Benghazi on September 9 and threatened to withdraw security if they didn’t cede to his political plans. Al-Gharabi is another of the Libyans who was purportedly fired (but who remained in charge) after the attack. And the Rafallah al-Sehati Brigade appeared to have stalled the American investigation by refusing to ensure their security in Benghazi.

Now, every report on these militias—as well as Abu Khatalla, who may be implicated in the attack, and al-Gharabi—talk about how amorphous these militias are, with intersecting memberships. But somewhere in those intersections seem to be people who had access to US security information and used it to launch the attack.