

WHAT “DESERT WARRIORS” ATTACKED US IN LIBYA?

There’s a weird bifurcation in the coverage of yesterday’s Libya tragedy.

The Islamist plot in Benghazi

One strand of coverage revised the initial claims that the mob that burned the consulate in Libya were responding solely to an anti-Mohammed film, *The Innocence of Muslims*. Jihadist chat rooms and—presumably—SIGINT made it clear that the attack on the consulate was planned in advance, probably as retaliation for the death of Abu Yahya al-Libi, whom we killed in a drone strike in June.

The officials said there were indications that members of a militant faction calling itself Ansar al Sharia – which translates as Supporters of Islamic Law – may have been involved in organizing the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya’s second-largest city.

They also said some reporting from the region suggested that members of Al-Qaeda’s north Africa-based affiliate, known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, may have been involved.

“It bears the hallmarks of an organized attack” and appeared to be preplanned, one U.S. official said.

Not only does it suggest that Moon of Alabama was (once again) right. But it also made me remember this post from All Things Counterterrorism, which warned that killing Abu Yahya al-Libi might make Al Qaeda even more extreme.

One seriously underplayed piece of evidence that

this was planned is that after Consulate employees evacuated to a safe house and a helicopter of commandoes came to rescue them, they were ambushed at the purportedly secret location.

Capt. Fathi al-Obeidi, whose special operations unit was ordered by Libya's authorities to meet an eight-man U.S. Marine force at Benghazi airport, said that after his men and the Marines had found the American survivors who had evacuated the blazing consulate, the ostensibly secret location in an isolated villa came under an intense and highly accurate mortar barrage.

"I really believe that this attack was planned," he said, adding to suggestions by other Libyan officials that at least some of the hostility towards the Americans was the work of experienced combatants. "The accuracy with which the mortars hit us was too good for any regular revolutionaries."

[snip]

Speaking of the rescue mission, he said: "A team of commandos arrived by air and went to a farm which we thought was a secret location. Once they got there, they came under heavy fire from heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and automatic rifles, which resulted in the death of two others."

(Note, I'm not sure, but this may suggest two safe locations were compromised, an urban villa and a farm, each attacked with different weapons; I'm trying to clarify this. Update: Yes, two sites were compromised—apparently because the US shared the information with the Libyan militia.)

This suggests not only that professionals launched this attack with advance warning and serious weaponry (this is part of the reasons

Libyans initially blamed it on Qaddafi dead-enders), but that they did it with either inside knowledge or incredibly good intelligence.

The Islamophobic plot in California

The second strand of coverage has puzzled through who was responsible for the film itself.

The film was made by a "Sam Bacile," who claimed to the WSJ and AP to be Israeli. Then a "consultant" on the film, the militant Christian Steve Klein, refuted that claim, while claiming to know little of the film-maker's real story.

Klein told me that Bacile, the producer of the film, is not Israeli, and most likely not Jewish, as has been reported, and that the name is, in fact, a pseudonym. He said he did not know "Bacile"'s real name. He said Bacile contacted him because he leads anti-Islam protests outside of mosques and schools, and because, he said, he is a Vietnam veteran and an expert on uncovering al Qaeda cells in California.

[snip]

When I asked him to describe Bacile, he said: "I don't know that much about him. I met him, I spoke to him for an hour. He's not Israeli, no. I can tell you this for sure, the State of Israel is not involved, Terry Jones (the radical Christian Quran-burning pastor) is not involved. His name is a pseudonym. All these Middle Eastern folks I work with have pseudonyms. I doubt he's Jewish. I would suspect this is a disinformation campaign."

Then the AP figured out "Sam Bacile" is actually a Coptic Christian with 2010 check kiting conviction named Nakoula Basseley Nakoula who lied to them about his identity.

Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, 55, told The Associated Press in an interview outside

Los Angeles that he was manager for the company that produced "Innocence of Muslims," which mocked Muslims and the prophet Muhammad and may have caused inflamed mobs that attacked U.S. missions in Egypt and Libya. He provided the first details about a shadowy production group behind the film.

[snip]

Nakoula denied he had posed as Bacile. During a conversation outside his home, he offered his driver's license to show his identity but kept his thumb over his middle name, Basseley. Records checks by the AP subsequently found it and other connections to the Bacile persona.

Laura Rozen discovered that in July 2011, Klein, the militant Christian, set up a company called Concerned Citizens for the First Amendment that seems to have coincided with the filming of the video.

It became clear that the film was originally shot as a script called *Desert Warriors*, with completely different names. The link to Mohammed was overdubbed into the sound track in post-production.

Cindy Lee Garcia, an actress from Bakersfield, Calif., has a small role in the Muhammed movie as a woman whose young daughter is given to Muhammed to marry. But in a phone interview this afternoon, Garcia told us she had no idea she was participating in an offensive spoof on the life of Muhammed when she answered a casting call through an agency last summer and got the part.

The script she was given was titled simply *Desert Warriors*.

"It was going to be a film based on how things were 2,000 years ago," Garcia said. "It wasn't based on anything to do

with religion, it was just on how things were run in Egypt. There wasn't anything about Muhammed or Muslims or anything."

In the script and during the shooting, nothing indicated the controversial nature of the final product, now called *Muslim Innocence*. Muhammed wasn't even called Muhammed; he was "Master George," Garcia said. The word "Muhammed" was dubbed over in post-production, as were essentially all other offensive references to Islam and Muhammed.

For example, at 9:03 in the trailer, Garcia berates her husband, who wants to send their daughter to Muhammed: "Is your Muhammed a child molester?" she says in the final product. But the words are dubbed over what she actually said. The line in the script—and the line Garcia gave during filming—was, "is your God a child molester," Garcia told us today.

In short, a shady group of Islamophobes started working on this hoax video over a year ago, posted it in English to little notice this summer, but then loaded it up in Arabic just in time to set off riots earlier this week.

In other words, a day of reporting have corrected a bunch of initial misconceptions to reveal a plot led by radical Islamists in North Africa and a plot led by radical Islamophobe Egyptian Christians here, both remarkably coinciding in a Consulate attack on 9/11, the death of one of our most qualified Ambassadors, and mobs across the Islamic world.

And that may, in fact, be what we have: two plots. It's not surprising the Islamists struck on 9/11, nor is it surprising the Islamophobes deliberately incited violence for 9/11.

For the moment, though, I have just one question about that theory.

The Islamists used the mobs as cover for their attack in Benghazi, but the attack had been planned in advance, complete with mortars in place to attack the evacuation site.

Now maybe it was just auspicious for the Islamists that some Egyptian-American Islamophobes incited mobs on precisely the day Islamists planned their attack. Maybe it was just auspicious for terrorists on both sides of the Atlantic this timing came together.

It is, after all, 9/11, a day that incites extremists of all sorts.

Or maybe there's another explanation entirely, in which all the identities we're working with thus far are covers?

Given that the mobs continue in Egypt and have spread to Yemen, we might want to get a more solid answer to this question than we now have.