

WHY CAN'T DARRELL ISSA READ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL?

In addition to the rather amusing fact that Darrell Issa is conducting an investigation that Mike Rogers should be conducting, there's another oddity about his "investigation." The answers to the questions he asks Hillary Clinton have been available for over 10 days in this WSJ front page article.

In his letter, Issa asks,

1. Was State Department headquarters in Washington aware of all the above incidents? If not, why not?
2. If so, what measures did the State Department take to match the level of security provided to the U.S. Mission in Libya to the level of threat?
3. Please detail any requests made by Embassy Tripoli to State Department headquarters for additional security, whether in general or in light of specific attacks mentioned above. How did the Department respond to each of these requests.

In the September 21 article, the WSJ listed several of the attacks in Issa's letter (as well as an April 10 attack on the UN's envoy). More importantly, it provided anonymous explanations from senior State Department officials describing their thinking about security in

Benghazi.

The State Department chose to maintain only limited security in Benghazi, Libya, despite months of sporadic attacks there on U.S. and other Western missions. And while the U.S. said it would ask Libya to boost security there, it did so just once, for a one-week period in June, according to Libyan officials.

[snip]

State Department officials said security for the consulate was frequently reviewed and was deemed sufficient to counter what U.S. officials considered to be the most likely threat at the time: a limited hit-and-run attack with rocket-propelled grenades or improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

There was a string of attacks in Benghazi in the months before Sept. 11, including a June 6 IED explosion outside the consulate compound. "These types of incidents were the ones that were our principal concerns," a senior State Department official said. Based on the outcome of the June 6 attack, in which a perimeter wall was damaged but no Americans hurt, a second State Department official added: "Our security plan worked."

[snip]

[After the Brits pulled out of their consulate in Benghazi] The U.S. deemed the security level sufficient and decided to stay, "given the very important mission that we have in eastern Libya to support U.S. national security interests," said a senior State Department official. He said "robust" security improvements had been made to the compound since the Americans moved into it in May 2011, including cement

barriers and barbed wire.

More importantly, the article describes who made the decision to opt for a light security approach over something more aggressive: Ambassador Stevens.

Current and former officials said the security choices in Benghazi reflected efforts by Mr. Stevens to maintain a low-profile security posture and show faith in Libya's new leaders, despite questions about their ability to rein in heavily armed bands of militants. Officials say Mr. Stevens personally advised against having Marines posted at the embassy in Tripoli, apparently to avoid a militarized U.S. presence.

The security plan for the consulate also reflected confidence Mr. Stevens felt in a city where he worked for months with rebels battling Moammar Gadhafi's rule.

Eli Lake was able to get a similar explanation for the security at the consulate in his story about Issa's letter.

A senior State Department official contacted for this story said the ambassador was "not reckless" with his own security or that of his staff. But this official also acknowledged that the ambassador was "an old-school diplomat" and strongly desired to have as few barriers between himself and the Libyan people.

Issa must know this is the answer to some of his questions. Couple that with Issa's letter's focus on Stevens' choice to keep running even after someone threatened him on Facebook, and some of this amounts to a political attack on a dead man.

Ambassador Stevens was in the habit of

taking early morning runs around Tripoli along with members of his security detail. According to sources, sometime in June 2012, a posting on a pro-Gaddafi Facebook page trumpeted these runs and directed a threat against Ambassador Stevens along with a stock photo of him. It is reported that, after stopping these morning runs for about a week, the Ambassador resumed them.

I wonder if Darrell Issa is also going to beat up David Petraeus for insisting on taking morning runs each day?

None of this is to say that State made the right decisions on security—though Ishmael Jones probably offers a better solution than the militarized consulates Issa’s anonymous sources seem to back. He suggests that the amount of CIA activity at the Consulate is one thing that made it a target.

A hostile intelligence service can shut down an embassy just by keeping track of who walks in and out. A hostile enemy can obliterate an embassy using obsolete military weapons. Once an embassy is neutralized, it can no longer gather information to protect itself, much less serve the needs of Americans and our allies.

The solution is to have people operating outside of those embassies. I did this continuously in foreign countries – including Libya – for more than 15 of my 18 years in the CIA. I had no security, no Marine guards, not even an alarm system in my house. Except for brief tours in war zones, I never carried a weapon. The enemy did not disrupt or attack me because they couldn’t identify and locate me. The enemy would never have been able to locate the safe houses I used because they were unconnected to any embassy. I never had diplomatic

immunity, and it didn't bother me a bit. Diplomatic immunity didn't protect our ambassador in Libya.

The Israelis, facing acute threats, figured out the disadvantages of embassies and in the 1990's moved their information and intelligence gathering outside of embassies.

But this earlier WSJ article shows that a week before Republican operatives met to plot out their Jimmy Carter strategy, and 10 days before Issa wrote his letter, some of the same issues were being reported in the press. (Note, too, that the WSJ story quotes Susan Collins responding to a Hillary Clinton briefing on this, suggesting that some of this reporting may come from a briefing State already did to the appropriate committees.)

Now, I'm sure Issa would like to force these anonymous State Department officials to go on the record—and frankly, State should explain these on the record.

But journalists have already done much of the work that Issa—and much of the press—is pretending is a legitimate attempt to answer questions.