

See Something, Say Something

(About Benghazi)

by G. Murphy Donovan (February 2016)



Libyan arms bazaar

Clandestine Intelligence agents meet with the press for one of three reasons: to betray, to leak in support of policy, or spin the narrative when policy fails. Hard to know what was in play the other day when the former CIA Benghazi station chief, cover name “Bob,” met with two *Washington Post* reporters, Adam Goldman and Greg Miller. When an administration yarn needs to be spun on the [front page](#), there’s no better venue than the *Washington Post*.

For the record, the stated purpose of CIA meeting with the *Post* was to deny the literary and Hollywood version of the Libya fiasco, a 15 January release called *13 Hours, the Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*, Michael Bay, director. It is possible also, in fairness, to imagine that John Brennan’s CIA is slipstreaming with the *Post* and Mrs. Bill Clinton as she approaches her own trial by fire in the 2016 presidential primaries.

The Bay film was based on a book written by four [GRS](#) contract soldiers who served under euphemist Bob at the CIA Annex in Benghazi. The former special ops warriors said that CIA choked, Bob ordered a “stand down,” when Ambassador Chris Steven’s residence came under fire. CIA denied this to *Post* reporters. With Clintonian hair-splitting, the agency may be correct,

There was not one, but *two* stand-down orders, maybe *three*. The first delayed the GRS team from rescuing the ambassador. A [second](#) probably came from a national authority, yet to be disclosed, that prevented American air or ground reinforcements from reaching the CIA Annex when it subsequently came under fire after the residence was abandoned.

When the US ambassador and three other dead were recovered, the body bags were extracted from Tripoli on a Libyan aircraft, not a USAF asset. The third stand down was more about humiliation than failure of national leadership.

No rescue for the ambassador, no reinforcements for the besieged CIA Annex, and no dignified removal of the dead and wounded. Brave men and women thrice betrayed by an administration that released the *Taliban* high command from Guantanamo in exchange for an American slacker now on trial for treason. The Bowe [Bergdahl](#) deal with the *Taliban* was rationalized by the White House as a statement of American values (sic), “no man left behind.” Team Obama left more than its credibility in Libya.



Victory lap with Bergdahls

Who, what, where, when, and why are the traditional elements of both exposition and fiction. Cinema is often a little of both. A filmed version of history is of necessity a distillation if not condensation. Bay’s Benghazi flick, *13 Hours*, is all of these things and less. The “what, where, and when” are both good and dramatic, the “who and why” are a little limp. We still do not know what Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, James Clapper, or Martin Dempsey were doing while an embassy residence and a CIA “black” facility in Libya were being sacked by Sunni jihadists. Surely the White House, the State Department, the Intelligence Community, and the Department of Defense were monitoring the Benghazi blitz in real time. The command and control principals are not featured or mentioned in Bay’s epic; a curious omission for a film based on “real events.”

The “why” of Benghazi, that large CIA presence at the “Annex,” gets short shrift too. There is one scene where agents purchase some shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles from nefarious characters, but the gun running operation probably had a much broader charter that had little to do with keeping lethal weapons out of the wrong hands. The CIA Annex was very likely moving all manner of Gadhafi era weapons to Iraq and Syria to other Sunni jihadists. Once Muamar Gadhafi had been lynched in Libya, Bashar Assad in Syria was next on the regime change shit list.

Michael Bay may have whiffed on the “who” and “why,” but he hit it out of the park with CIA trade craft, or lack of it. *13 Hours* takes deadly aim at the agency practice of buying local Arab or sectarian tribes and then believing that the perfidious will stay bought. Ambassador Stevens was lost because Sunni Arab “allies” cannot be trusted, especially those who must be paid by Americans to defend their own country. CIA paying for “protection” in the Arab world is a little like some John wearing only a smile for protection after he buys a

hooker.

The US State Department is apparently tone deaf on both national and personal security. Sending an openly gay ambassador to yet another failed Muslim state has to be some version of assisted suicide. Sexual orientations are no secret these days at Foggy Bottom; however, that culture plays no part in Bay's film. Posting a gay man to Libya makes about as much sense as sending a petite blond [reporter](#), Lara Logan for example, to cover an Arab Spring riot in Egypt – reckless endangerment in both cases.

Chris Stevens, as portrayed in *13 Hours*, is a weak sister too; at once naïve, another Foggy Bottom naif, a cowering victim, not a guy in charge of anything. We don't really know how Ambassador Stevens died. Dead or alive, he was dragged out of the ambassador's residence and through the streets of Benghazi before being recovered by Americans. The Stevens' autopsy is still a state secret, another CYA caveat designed to protect jihadist and Arab reputation – or keep Americans in the dark.

The summary execution of Chris Stevens, a career foreign service officer, is not as instructive about Arab and Muslim culture as it is about the kind of arrogance that thrives at Foggy Bottom, the US State Department. In the main, Americans deployed overseas live in a bubble. Ambassadors, for the most part political hacks, often do not speak the language and/or have little experience with diplomacy, culture, or foreign policy.

The same might be said of pampered embassy staffs that often rely on local or imported contractors. Embassy and consulate employees often live in gated, secured, isolated communities where contact with locals is discouraged, limited, or impossible. American embassies, even in free world countries, have special pay allowances, servants, pools, gyms, commissaries, liquor stores, chauffer services, and other perks that replicate or surpass the amenities of a Washington, DC posting. The ugly American is not just a metaphor; it is the reality of most American ambassadors and now an established culture in the Foreign Service.

We might add that the title "ambassador" today is another word for political *baksheesh*. Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump take a candor bow here. If a government post can be bought, so can the appointee. The State Department is one

of those American institutions where most of the principals are naive amateurs by design. Chris Stevens discovered the truth about his fey colleagues the hard way.

CIA, NSA, and DIA are embedded in the same bewildered bubbles where State Department vacuity flourishes. The cluelessness of Benghazi "Bob," is of a piece with the legendary [George Cave](#) at the US embassy in Teheran in the 1970s. It's not just that these guys couldn't or wouldn't see what was coming. When "it" got there, they didn't recognize the threat, suffered indignities gladly – or were more concerned with covering their asses than they were worried about saving the day.

The theocratic coup in Iran was a landmark victory for the Shia *jihād* and theocracy, just as 9/11 was a benchmark triumph for the Saudi/Sunni *jihād*. Benghazi is just the Libyan feather in the Islamist *keffiyeh*. Thanks to regime change folly and blowback, Libya may now fall to ISIS just as Persia fell to the Ayatollahs.

The venality of CIA's Benghazi station chief is an eerie echo of Barbara [Bodine](#)'s arrogance after the USS Cole disaster in Yemen, another *jihād* triumph. In both cases, US apparatchiks on station didn't play well with real men carrying real guns. Both Ambassador Bodine, and now agent Benghazi Bob, were more concerned with Muslim sensitivities than they are with American lives. In both cases, Washington deferred to fear, flaccid diplomats, and timid Intel pukers, not real warriors. Foreign policy is not a team sport anymore.

The message to Americans abroad today; for citizen, soldier, and diplomat alike is clear now. Washington does not have your back. You are expendable.

The film *13 Hours* gets it exactly right with "Bob," the CIA apparatchik in Benghazi. Bob is timid by his own admission, he can't make a timely decision in a crisis, and when things go south, he looks for someone to blame. In the *Washington Post* piece, CIA has Bob saying that he was waiting for help from Arab "locals." Hard to believe that CIA has yet to admit that the locals in Benghazi were the problem all along. Muamar Gadhafi used to claim that so-called freedom fighters in Libya were jihadists. Now we know that he was correct. The Benghazi fiasco is just one symptom of chronic national security stupidity about small wars, Islam, *jihād*, and terror in the Obama era.

The very fact the CIA and State must rely on contractors gets to the heart of bureaucratic darkness. Every contractor attached to every embassy or CIA station abroad must ask the same question every day: "If we contractors are paid to do the heavy lifting, what are all these government slugs getting paid for?"

Withal, those CIA/State "contractors" at Benghazi, all former warriors, were patronized if not abandoned by their government handlers. Now those heroes have come home and returned the contempt in kind – in a book and on film. Two thumbs way up.

Where there is no justice, getting even will have to do. See something, say something, indeed!

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