



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 16, 2012

Obama, Biden Didn't Know About Libya Security Requests, Spokesmen Say

In what might be called “Benghazigate,” the controversy has continued over what the president and vice president knew, and when they knew, about requests for increased security at diplomatic posts in Libya, prior to the September 11 armed attack on the consulate in Benghazi that killed four Americans, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens.



ForeignPolicy.com [reported](#) October 14 that the White House has denied any knowledge of repeated requests made to the State Department for more security in Libya. Deputy National Security Advisor for Communications Ben Rhodes said Vice President Joe Biden was speaking only for himself and President Obama, and not of the administration more generally, when he said in the October 11 vice presidential debate with Paul Ryan, “We weren’t told they wanted more security. We did not know they wanted more security there.” Biden’s remarks came under fire from Republicans, who pointed to a well publicized House committee hearing just one day earlier in which officials charged with responsibility for diplomatic security testified that their requests for more agents had been denied by the State Department.

“All of us at post were in sync that we wanted these resources,” Eric Nordstrom, the top regional security officer in Libya over the past summer, testified at an October 10 hearing by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Nordstrom said that Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Charlene Lamb told him not to request a Site Security Team extension. “I was told that because there would be too much political cost,” Nordstrom said. “We went ahead and requested it, anyway,”

Nordstrom said his request for an additional 12 agents for diplomatic security in Libya was rebuffed by the officer from the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. “His response to that was, ‘You’re asking for the sun, moon, and the stars.’” In his prepared testimony, Nordstrom said that “because of Libyan political sensitivities, armed private security companies were not allowed to operate in Libya.” The Benghazi consulate had arranged through a British company to hire unarmed Libyan guards to work inside the compound, while local Libyan militia patrolled outside, he said. Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-



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Calif.) locked horns with Lamb after the deputy assistant secretary acknowledged there were only three guards on duty at the time of the attack and said the State Department “had the correct number of assets in Benghazi at the time.”

“To start off by saying you had the correct number, and our ambassador and three other individuals are dead, and people are in the hospital recovering because it only took moments to breach that facility somehow doesn’t seem to ring true to the American people,” Issa [said](#).

Lt. Col. Andrew Wood, a Utah National Guardsman who was a site security commander in Libya from February through August, told the committee that the regional security officer “was never able to attain the numbers he felt comfortable with.”

“The security in Benghazi was a struggle and remained a struggle throughout my time there,” Wood said. “Diplomatic security remained weak. In April, there was only one U.S. diplomatic security agent there.”

Issa drew sharp criticism from Democrats, who claimed it was to score partisan points that he had called the hearing at a time when Congress was in recess as members campaign for reelection. Democrats also claimed Republicans had cut millions from diplomatic security budgets. And Rhodes told *Foreign Policy.com* that the requests for additional personnel were for Tripoli, not Benghazi. Those requests are handled as a matter of routine at the State Department and would not have come to the attention of the president or vice president, he said. David Axelrod, the president’s senior political advisor, [said the same](#) on *Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace*.

“So, we’re now getting into a definition of what the word ‘we’ means,” said Wallace, who asked if when the vice president says “we,” “Biden is not talking about the Obama administration. He’s not talking about the State Department. He’s just talking about himself and the President?”

“Again, [what] he was talking about was what he, the president knew because these matters were being handled at the State Department,” Axelrod said.

Nordstrom, who still works for the State Department on diplomatic security, said at one point he had become so frustrated in his requests for more personnel that he told an official there, “For me, the Taliban is on the inside of the building.”

“For me and my staff,” he told the committee, “it was abundantly clear that we were not going to get resources until the aftermath of an incident. And the question that we were to ask again is, ‘How thin does the ice have to get before someone falls through?’”

Photo of President Obama and Vice President Biden: AP Images



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