



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 10, 2013

## Report Says al-Qaeda, CIA Warnings Deleted From Benghazi Talking Points

References to al-Qaeda and to CIA warnings of terrorist threats in Benghazi in the months before the attack on the U.S. diplomatic facility there were deleted from the now famous “talking points” delivered to Congress and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, ABC News [reported](#) Friday.

The report cites 12 different versions of the talking points obtained by ABC, from the original CIA draft to the final version. Summaries of State Department e-mails, some of which were first published by Stephen Hayes in the *Weekly Standard*, show the documents “extensively edited,” the report said. White House e-mails show “extensive input” from the State Department, including requests that all references to Ansar al-Sharia be deleted, as well references to CIA warnings about terrorist threats in Benghazi in the months preceding the September 11 attack. According to the report, deleted portions included this paragraph:

The Agency has produced numerous pieces on the threat of extremists linked to al-Qa’ida in Benghazi and eastern Libya. These noted that, since April, there have been at least five other attacks against foreign interests in Benghazi by unidentified assailants, including the June attack against the British Ambassador’s convoy. We cannot rule out the individuals has (sic) previously surveilled the U.S. facilities, also contributing to the efficacy of the attacks.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland objected to that information being included, saying in an e-mail to the White House and intelligence officials that it “could be abused by members [of Congress] to beat up the State Department for not paying attention to warnings, so why would we want to feed that either?”

The talking points have been a source of controversy ever since Rice appeared on several Sunday morning talk shows five days after the heavily armed assault in Benghazi killed U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Rice described the events as growing out of a “spontaneous — not premeditated — response to what had transpired in Cairo,” where hours earlier an angry mob had stormed the U.S. embassy grounds and torn down the U.S. flag in a demonstration reportedly inspired by an American-made anti-Muslim video that had appeared on YouTube.





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"We believe that folks in Benghazi, a small number of people came to the embassy to — or to the consulate, rather, to replicate the sort of challenge that was posed in Cairo," Rice said in her September 16 appearance on ABC's *This Week*. "And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons.... And it then evolved from there."

Rice's description of the events as spontaneous and unpremeditated was roundly criticized by congressional Republicans, in the news media, and most recently by former deputy chief of mission in Libya Gregory Hicks, who [told](#) the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Wednesday that when he heard it, "I was stunned. My jaw dropped and I was embarrassed." Hicks emphatically rejected the connection between the Cairo riot over the video and the attack in Benghazi.

"The YouTube video was a nonevent in Libya," said Hicks, who testified there was no evidence of a demonstration at the U.S. mission preceding the attack. "The only report that our mission made through every channel was that there had been an attack on a consulate," he said.

Yet CIA's first drafts, as quoted in Friday's ABC report, also said the attack appeared to have been "spontaneously inspired by the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. That being said," the agency added, "we do know that Islamic extremists with ties to al-Qa'ida participated in the attack." The draft went on to name the al-Qaeda-affiliated group, Ansar al-Sharia. Nuland objected to the naming of the groups because "we don't want to prejudice the investigation."

The FBI, which was in charge of the investigation, "did not have major concerns with the points and offered only a couple minor suggestions," according to a National Security Council staff member's response to Nuland's message. After some minor editorial changes were made, Nuland wrote in a September 14 e-mail: "These changes don't resolve all of my issues or those of my buildings (sic) leadership," Nuland wrote. The State Department's concerns would be addressed the following morning at a "Deputies Committee meeting," Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes wrote in an e-mail.

"We must make sure that the talking points reflect all agency equities, including those of the State Department, and we don't want to undermine the FBI investigation," Rhodes wrote.

On Saturday morning, the day before Rice would make the circuit of the Sunday morning talk shows, the CIA drafted the final version in a White House meeting, ABC reported, deleting all references to al-Qaeda and to security warnings in Benghazi prior to the attack.

The attack on Benghazi came less than two months before last year's presidential election and news of the talking point revisions will likely fuel speculation that they were made to minimize any embarrassment President Obama might suffer from a successful attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission by al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists. The killing of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and success in destroying terrorist cells and strongholds were a major part of the Obama campaign narrative. Any suggestion that the administration had been, in Nuland's words "not paying attention to warnings" from the CIA about terrorist activity in Benghazi could also present political problems for the president. Numerous reports have surfaced since the attack of requests for additional security that had been rejected by the State Department. Eric Nordstrom, former regional security officer in Libya, [told](#) the House Oversight Committee Wednesday that the department's response to his repeated requests for additional security had been, in his words, "Basically, stop complaining."

As reported by ABC, the documents "appear to directly contradict" previous White House denials of any substantive changes made to the assessment of "the intelligence community."



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“Those talking points originated from the intelligence community. They reflect the IC’s best assessments of what they thought had happened,” Press Secretary Jay Carney told reporters at the White House briefing on November 28, 2012. “The White House and the State Department have made clear that the single adjustment that was made to those talking points by either of those two institutions were changing the word ‘consulate’ to ‘diplomatic facility’ because ‘consulate’ was inaccurate.” Carney still insists the changes made were “stylistic and nonsubstantive.”

“The CIA drafted these talking points and redrafted these talking points,” he told ABC News. “The fact that there are inputs is always the case in a process like this, but the only edits made by anyone here at the White House were stylistic and nonsubstantive. They corrected the description of the building or the facility in Benghazi from consulate to diplomatic facility and the like. And ultimately, this all has been discussed and reviewed and provided in enormous levels of detail by the administration to Congressional investigators, and the attempt to politicize the talking points, again, is part of an effort to, you know, chase after what isn’t the substance here.”



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