



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 5, 2014

Rice Has “Benghazi Moment” Over Bergdahl’s “Battlefield” Capture

President Obama’s national security advisor may have reopened an administration credibility gap with her statement about Bowe Bergdahl’s “battlefield” capture by the Taliban. On the Sunday talk-show circuit, Susan Rice defended the president’s decision to trade five high-level Taliban members for the return of the U.S. soldier, calling it a “sacred obligation,” despite charges by Republicans that the trade violated U.S. law and puts other Americans at risk.



“Sergeant Bergdahl wasn’t simply a hostage, he was an American prisoner of war, captured on the battlefield,” Rice said on ABC’s *This Week*. “We have a sacred obligation that we have upheld since the founding of our Republic to do our utmost to bring back our men and women who were taken in battle. And we did that in this instance.” The administration was “committed to getting him back as we’re committed to bringing every American taken on the battlefield back,” she told host George Stephanopoulos. “He served the United States with honor and distinction,” she said of Bergdahl during the same interview.

Yet the Pentagon concluded in 2010 that Bergdahl, missing in action since June 2009, had walked away from his unit in Afghanistan, the Associated Press reported. The statement that he was “captured on the battlefield” is reminiscent of assertions made by Rice, then the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, when she said repeatedly after the September 11, 2012 Benghazi attack that the heavily armed assault on Americans there was a spontaneous response to an anti-Islamic video circulating on the Internet. The ambassador was following “talking points” prepared by the CIA and the White House.

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The prisoners to be released from the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, called by some the “jihadist dream team,” includes Mullah Mohammad Fazl, a former deputy defense minister for the Taliban. They are to be transferred to Qatar, where they are to remain for a year while the Qatar government closely monitors their activities. The danger, say critics of the deal, is that they will eventually reenter the fighting in Afghanistan, where President Obama has said the United States will maintain up to 10,000 troops through 2016. Republicans argue the swap increased the incentive for the Taliban to capture American soldiers and puts American lives at increased risk. They also have charged Obama with violating a federal statute requiring the president to inform Congress 30 days before transferring prisoners from Guantanamo. Rice insisted the president was acting within his authority as commander-in-chief when weighing the legal requirement against reports of Bergdahl’s failing health.

“We had reason to be concerned that this was an urgent and an acute situation, that his life could have been at risk,” Rice said. “We did not have 30 days to wait. And had we waited and lost him, I don’t think anybody would have forgiven the United States government.”



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Some former members of Bergdahl's unit have publicly called him a deserter and said that he is responsible for the deaths of half a dozen or more U.S. soldiers they say were killed in the effort to find him. Veterans from around the country have posted messages on Facebook and Twitter or requested by phone calls or e-mail that Hailey, Idaho, cancel a June 28 celebration for Bergdahl, who has become a hometown hero. The city cancelled the celebration, Reuters reported Wednesday. City administrator Heather Dawson said the event was called off because the town "will be unable to safely manage the number of people expected."

One e-mail to the Hailey City Hall said Obama "made a big mistake trading the 5 thugs and terrorists for this deserter," while another suggested inviting "the families of the six honorable soldiers killed trying to find him on his 'walk about.'" Nathan Bradley Bethea, who served in the same battalion with Bergdahl, wrote in an essay at *The Daily Beast* that the search had resulted in the deaths of eight soldiers, whom he named.

"He has finally returned," Bethea wrote. "Those men will never have the opportunity."

But it is not clear how many, if any, of the Americans killed in Paktika Province were searching for Bergdahl at the time. Two soldiers died during the most intense period of the search after Sergeant Bergdahl's June 30 disappearance, the *New York Times* reported. "Both were inside an outpost that came under attack, not out patrolling and running checkpoints looking for him. The other six soldiers died in late August and early September." But even though the all-out search was "wound down" after eight days, some soldiers report being sent on patrols to look for Bergdahl for up to 90 days after his disappearance.

"Everything that we did in those days was to advance the search for Bergdahl," said Joshua Cornelison, a former medic in Bergdahl's platoon. "If we were doing some mission and there was a reliable report that Bergdahl was somewhere, our orders were that we were to quit that mission and follow that report."

Bergdahl left his body armor and weapons behind when he disappeared from his military base in the remote province near the border with Pakistan, the *Times* reported, based on account by a senior military official who was briefed on the investigation. He took with him a backpack, knives, and writing materials. According to one of the soldiers serving with him, he had already sent home his computer and other personal items, perhaps indicating he had no intention to return. Army officials have disputed reports that he left a letter behind, saying he wished to renounce his American citizenship, but a 2012 report in *Rolling Stone* magazine quoted an e-mail from the soldier to his father shortly before his disappearance.

The future is too good to waste on lies. And life is way too short to care for the damnation of others, as well as to spend helping fools with their ideas that are wrong. I have seen their ideas and I am ashamed to even be American. The horror of the self-righteous arrogance that they thrive in. It is all revolting.

"OBEY YOUR CONSCIENCE!" was the subject line of the reply Robert Bergdahl e-mailed back to his son just three days before the soldier left his unit. (Emphasis in original.)

According to one of the members of Bergdahl's platoon, the then-23-year-old PFC ordered Rosetta Stone instructional recordings to learn Dari and Arabic and Pashto, languages spoken in Afghanistan. At the White House press conference Saturday, Robert Bergdahl said Bowe might now have trouble speaking English. He spoke a message to his son in Pashto, followed by a prayer in the same language.



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The elder Bergdahl apparently learned the language during the time his son was in the hands of the Taliban, who were demanding release of Guantanamo Bay detainees in exchange for the American. “No family understands the detainee issue like ours,” he posted in a tweet pleading for his son’s release. Then just four days before the release was announced on Saturday, Robert Bergdahl posted a tweet to a Taliban spokesman.

“I am still working to free all Guantanamo prisoners,” he wrote in a tweet that has since been deleted. “God will repay for the death of every Afghan child, ameen.”

According to Neil Munro at the *Daily Caller*, Bergdahl praised Allah during his and his wife’s appearance with Obama at the White House Saturday:

At the end of the brief event, the soldier’s father, Bob Bergdahl, recited the most frequent phrase in the Koran — “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim” — which means “In the name of Allah, most Gracious, most Compassionate.”

After Bergdahl finished his statement and his praise for Allah, Obama hugged him.

The Taliban echoed Bergdahl, saying the trade happened “due to the benevolence of Allah Almighty and the sacrifices of the heroic and courageous Mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate.”

President Obama, in Poland at the beginning of a trip to three European countries, said at a news conference that the circumstances leading to Bergdahl’s five years with the Taliban had no bearing on the effort to gain his release. “Regardless of the circumstances, whatever those circumstances may turn out to be, we still get an American soldier back if he’s held in captivity,” Obama said. “We don’t condition that.” A statement issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Bergdahl could still face disciplinary action if reports of his desertion are true.

“Our army’s leaders will not look away from misconduct if it occurred,” said General Martin Dempsey. “The questions about this particular soldier’s conduct are separate from our effort to recover ANY U.S. service member in enemy captivity,” he wrote. (Emphasis in original.) “This was likely the last, best opportunity to free him. As for the circumstances of his capture, when he is able to provide them, we’ll learn the facts.”

Cody Full, a member of Bergdahl’s platoon, said he has no doubt the newly released Taliban prisoner is a deserter. “He did not serve the United States with honor,” Full said in an interview with Fox News. “We all took an oath. He violated his oath when he deserted us and put other Americans in jeopardy.”

Photo of Susan Rice: AP Images



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