

THE OPPORTUNISTIC ATTACK IN BENGHAZI

In addition to the IssaLeaks dump, there were several reports on the Benghazi attack Friday suggesting it was an “opportunistic” attack: not planned in advance, but not an outgrowth of non-existent protests; not planned by al Qaeda, but carried out by those with ties to it.

That assessment corresponds with what my best wildarsed guess about what happened, based on the IssaLeaks documents (perhaps not surprisingly, since those documents presumably come from State’s investigations).

An anonymous official describes the current understanding of the attack this way to Greg Miller.

“There isn’t any intelligence that the attackers pre-planned their assault days or weeks in advance,” a U.S. intelligence official said. “The bulk of available information supports the early assessment that the attackers launched their assault opportunistically after they learned about the violence at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.”

[snip]

U.S. officials have backed away from claims that protesters had gathered around the Benghazi mission before it was overrun. Instead, analysts now think that the siege involved militants who “may have aspired to attack the U.S. in Benghazi,” and mobilized after seeing protesters scale the walls of the embassy in Cairo to protest the controversial video.

The violence in Benghazi appears to have involved militants with ties to al-Qaeda in North Africa, but no evidence indicates that it was organized by al-

Qaeda, or timed to coincide with the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, officials said.

The LAT includes similar quotes—as well as eyewitness accounts describing the attackers to be a mix of experienced fighters and apparent civilians.

Libyan guards who served as the security force at the U.S. compound said the mob was made up of disparate types, some who appeared to be experienced fighters and others who were not. There were long-bearded men whose faces were obscured by scarves in the style of practiced militants and called each other “sheik.” But there also were younger men, some who looked like teenagers with wispy beards on their uncovered faces.

“There were civilians there, and many were carrying weapons,” said Sheik Mohamed Oraibi, a hard-line Islamic preacher who arrived soon after the attack began. He said the attackers arrived in about 20 pickup trucks, many of which had machine guns mounted on them in the style favored by rebels during the Libyan revolution last year.

These details, along with the materials in the IssaLeaks, appear to support an early report from CNN, stating that the suspected culprit was the Imprisoned Omar Abdul Rahman Brigades.

A pro-al Qaeda group responsible for a previous armed assault on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi is the chief suspect in Tuesday’s attack that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya, sources tracking militant Islamist groups in eastern Libya say.

They also note that the attack immediately followed a call from al

Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri for revenge for the death in June of Abu Yahya al-Libi, a senior Libyan member of the terror group.

The group suspected to be behind the assault – the Imprisoned Omar Abdul Rahman Brigades – first surfaced in May when it claimed responsibility for an attack on the International Red Cross office in Benghazi. The following month the group claimed responsibility for detonating an explosive device outside the U.S. Consulate and later released a video of that attack.

A June 25 cable from the IssaLeaks dump–labeled routine–noted the Imprisoned Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rahman Brigade (ISOARB) had taken credit for three attacks against western targets: two attacks on the ICRC (which it accused of proselytizing Christianity) and the June 6 attack on the US mission in Benghazi (see PDF 45). CNN says they're likely also responsible for a June 11 attack on the UK Ambassador's convoy. Naming the brigade after the Blind Sheikh suggests an affiliation with Egypt, his home country.

Darrell Issa's letter to Hillary Clinton includes the message ISOARB left on Facebook claiming credit.

After we confirmed that the ICRC were giving out the Bible to the refugees of Tuwerga in Benghazi, a group of Mujaheddin attacked the HQ of the ICRC with an RPG and it targeted the meeting room inside the building. We didn't want to hurt the Christians it is just a warning, we also didn't want to hurt any Muslims working there. We recorded it on video and will punish it soon–so the ICRC must take down their flag with the red cross and close its offices in Libya. We announce that Libya is an Islamic State. ... Finally, now we are

preparing a message for the Americans
for disturbing the skies over Derna.

Curiously, the description of the May 22 attack on the ICRC in a long report on security issues in the previous year (PDF 107) includes part of that statement, but not the part about sending a message to the Americans.

The brigade accused the ICRC of attempting to convert internally displaced members of the Tawergha ethnic minority to Christianity. It called for the NGO to close its offices, and declared Libya to be an Islamic state.

According to CNN, the ISOARB made a video of this attack and posted it to Jihadist websites.

The description of IED attack on the mission (PDF 110) rather curiously doesn't include details about the ISOARB's motive, beyond saying they claimed credit for the attack. The June 25 cable says statements, "described the attack against the United States as 'target[ing] the Christians supervising the management of the consulate.'" But in an earlier article, CNN says the leaflets left at the attack claimed it was retaliation for our killing of Abu Yahya al Libi, whom we killed in a drone strike two days before the attack.

The State security issues description of the attacks on the UK Ambassador's convoy and the Misrata ICRC (PDF 111) don't describe who was responsible.

One more document from IssaLeaks suggests State agrees that the events from June may have ties to the September 11 attack: the last several pages pertain to a June 7 "conference of diverse brigades and groups supporting Islamic Sharia in Libya ... organized in Benghazi." Among other details recorded about the event was the claim we had bombed a training camp outside of Derna.

US drones are not only hovering all the

time over eastern Libya, they also bombed a training camp run by Abdulbasit Azuz, a commander from Derna.

Yes, you heard that right, US drones are bombing Libya already.

Derna, Benghazi, other parts of eastern Libya are teeming with mujahideen, InshaAllaah, high levels of popular support, specially [sic] from the youth, even in western cities like Misrata and Tripoli.

If it's true that a group of militia members working under the ISOARB banner carried out the September 11 attack, here's the chronology that would attach to it:

May 22: Attack on ICRC in Benghazi

June 4: US kills Abu Yahya al Libi in drone strike

June 6: ISOARB attacks consulate in Benghazi, partly in response to Abu Yahya killing

June 7: Gathering of militia members favoring Sharia law takes place in Benghazi

June 11 and 12: Two attacks by ISOARB, one in Benghazi and one in Misrata, aiming to get western targets to pull out

September 10: Ayman al-Zawahiri confirms the death of Abu Yahya

September 11: Protests in Cairo, then attack in Benghazi

The story the intelligence community is telling is that after protestors scaled the Embassy in Cairo, militia members in Benghazi launched an opportunistic attack on the mission. It would make a lot of sense that a group who had earlier launched an opportunistic attack on it, in

response to Abu Yahya's death, would do the same again.

Frankly, I don't buy that it didn't come with some advance warning, which I'll explain in another post.

But if all of this is true, it raises another question for me. Drones weren't surveilling Benghazi—a drone started surveilling the compound well after the attack started. But they were surveilling Derna (indeed, that's one of the complaints the militia had). Was the intelligence from Derna shared as it should have been?