

CHRIS STEVENS' RESCHEDULED MEETING WITH THE FEBRUARY 17TH BRIGADE

I'm working on a post on the Blue Mountain Group Libyan contractors' role in the Benghazi attack. But first, I want to point out a detail pertaining to the security provided by the February 17th Brigade—the militia that provided armed patrols outside of the Benghazi consulate.

In its report on the documents it found at the consulate the other day, the WaPo suggested one of the documents anticipated an attack.

At least one document found amid the clutter indicates that Americans at the mission were discussing the possibility of an attack in early September, just two days before the assault took place. The document is a memorandum dated Sept. 9 from the U.S. mission's security office to the 17th February Martyrs Brigade, the Libyan-government-sanctioned militia that was guarding the compound, making plans for a "quick reaction force," or QRF, that would provide security.

"In the event of an attack on the U.S. Mission," the document states, "QRF will request additional support from the 17th February Martyrs Brigade."

This appears to overstate the document somewhat. While it is clear that a September 9 document (page 8) lays out the terms of the militia's role as a Quick Reaction Force, the January 25, 2011 US Mission Evacuation Plan (page 9) anticipates the involvement of QRFs (since the plan pre-dated Qaddafi's ouster, the militia wouldn't have provided that service at the time). And the militia was already serving in

that role (and served better than some of the western contractors), according to reports. So the document seems to reflect ongoing discussions about that security agreement—including an apparently new understanding that the Americans would provide housing for the QRF personnel.

Now, that document was a draft agreement between the February 17th Brigade and the Regional Security Office.

But I do find one detail from Ambassador Stevens' schedule of interest. On September 11, the day he died, he was initially scheduled to meet with a representative of the militia at 11 AM. Though a hand-written note suggests that meeting was moved to "another day." (The itinerary may have been a draft, since it was printed on September 8 and had a few other hand-written notations, though interestingly it appears to have been folded at one point as if to put in a pocket.)

That's not that big of a deal: after all, Stevens worked closely with the militias throughout the war. But it appears the Americans were in the process of tweaking their security agreement and it appears that Stevens intended to meet with the militia while he was in Benghazi. Given how central Stevens was in determining how much and what kind of security the consulate would have, I wonder whether part of those discussions were to discuss precisely the security concerns everyone is now pointing to as a big State lapse.

Note, Eli Lake's first story on Benghazi claimed an al Qaeda affiliate had asked the February 17 Brigade to stand down during this attack. And attacks on the Brigade were repeated in other right wing outlets.