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## Islamist group leader named as mastermind behind U.S. consulate massacre in Benghazi

- Ahmed Abu Khattala heads the Benghazi-based Ansar al-Sharia group
- Libyan officials say he was closely involved in the September 11 assault that killed four Americans including ambassador Christopher Stevens
- Consulate security entrusted to little-own British company
- How Obama handled aftermath of attack triggered war of words between the President and Mitt Romney in this week's second presidential debate

By [Graham Smith](#)

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The leader of an Islamist group has been named as a commander in last month's attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed three Americans including ambassador Christopher Stevens.

Ahmed Abu Khattala, who heads the Benghazi-based Ansar al-Sharia group, was closely involved in the September 11 assault, according to Libyan authorities.

Witnesses said they saw Abu Khattala lead the fatal assault, although his exact role has not been made clear.



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**Suspect: Ahmed Abu Khattala, who heads the Ansar al-Sharia group, was closely involved in the September 11 assault on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, according to Libyan authorities**

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**Ablaze:** The fighters who attacked the U.S. consulate came armed with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars



**Rage:** A protester holds his rifle during the assault on the Benghazi consulate

The claims further link Ansar al-Sharia to the attack, the aftermath of which has triggered a diplomatic war of words between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in the final run-up to next month's presidential election.

Khattala remains at large and has yet to be questioned in relation to the consulate blaze.

A U.S. official last week said the Obama administration is tracking Khattala, but added that the assault was likely to have been an organised group effort and not the brainchild of one man.

The official told the New York Times: 'Ansar al-Sharia is not only a shadowy group, it's also quite factionalised. There isn't necessarily one overall military commander of the group.'

Khattala was a member of the Islamist opposition when Muammar Gaddafi was alive and was imprisoned in the notorious Abu Salim jail. He was released last year and helped the rebels topple Gaddafi from power.

He then formed Ansar al-Sharia - which means 'supporters of Islamic law' - with other like-minded former political prisoners. The group now numbers between 100 and 200 fighters.



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**Killed: Ambassador Christopher Stevens (left) died following smoke inhalation, while agent Sean Smith (right) died in a desperate battle to save hi,**

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**Heroic: Former Navy SEALs Glen Doherty (left) and Tyrone Woods (right) were killed in a mortar attack**

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Family: Mr Stevens' brother Tom, and sisters Anne Stevens Sullivan and Hillary Stevens Koziol, speak at his memorial service in San Francisco City Hall yesterday



At loggerheads: The Obama administration's handling of the aftermath of the Benghazi attack came to the fore during Tuesday's second presidential campaign debate

## BENGAZI CONSULATE SECURITY ENTRUSTED TO LITTLE-KNOWN BRITISH COMPANY

The State Department's decision to hire Blue Mountain Group to guard the diplomatic mission in Benghazi entrusted security tasks to a little-known British company instead of the large firms it usually uses in overseas danger zones.

The contract was largely based on expediency, U.S. officials said, since no one knew how long the temporary mission would remain in the Libyan city.

The cradle of last year's uprising that ended Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule, Benghazi has been plagued by rising violence in recent months.

Security practices at the diplomatic compound, where Blue Mountain guards patrolled with flashlights and batons instead of guns, have come under U.S. government scrutiny in the wake of the September 11 attack that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

Federal contract data shows that the Benghazi security contract, worth up to \$783,284, was listed as a 'miscellaneous' award, not as part of the large master State Department contract that covers protection for overseas embassies.

'Blue Mountain was virtually unknown to the circles that studied private security contractors working for the United States, before the events in Benghazi,' said Charles Tiefer, a commissioner at the Commission on

Wartime Contracting, which studied U.S. contracting in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Several British government sources said that they were unfamiliar with Blue Mountain, which is based in Wales. They said British authorities used a different contractor for security protection in Libya.

Fred Burton, vice president of intelligence at the Stratfor consulting firm and a former U.S. diplomatic security agent, said he did not know Blue Mountain, but it likely got State Department work because it was already working in Libya.

Blue Mountain was able to work in Libya because it forged a business alliance with a local security firm, as required by Libyan regulations.

The firm hired about 20 Libyan men - including some who say they had minimal training - to screen visitors and help patrol the mission at Benghazi, according to Reuters interviews.

Some of the guards, who said they had been hired by Blue Mountain after a casual recruiting and screening process, sustained injuries and said they were ill-prepared to protect themselves or others when heavily armed militants last month stormed the rented villa that was serving as the mission.

Last week, the State Department said that it never believed the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate was the result of a protest over an anti-Islam movie, contradicting previous statements.

A dramatic new account revealed that Mr Stevens was locked inside a 'safe room' and choked to death from diesel-heavy smoke as the building around him burned to the ground.

Alongside him was a security guard, tasked with the impossible choice between staying in the deadly room, or facing the rocket-propelled grenades and machine-guns outside. Eventually the guard slipped through the window - and was cut down by the grenades.

No-one saw the ambassador alive again - another agent tried desperately to enter the safe-room, but could not find him anywhere.

The State Department's insistence that it never bought the story - as initially told by the White House and Susan Rice, U.S. ambassador to the UN - that a crude anti-Islam film made in California triggered the attack gave ammunition against Obama to the Romney campaign.

That came to the fore during Tuesday's second presidential campaign debate in Hartley, New York.

Mr Obama said he accepted responsibility for the consulate attack but angrily denied there had been any sort of cover-up over the tragedy.

He said: 'The suggestion that anyone on my team would play politics when we lost four of our own is offensive.'

But Mr Romney was dumfounded when Mr Obama said that the day after the attack he had described it as an 'act of terror'. The transcript, however, made it unclear whether the President was speaking generally or more specifically about Benghazi.

During his Rose Garden address on September 12, the day following the attack in Benghazi, Mr Obama said: 'No acts of terror will ever shake the resolve of this great nation, alter that character or eclipse the light of the values that we stand for.'

While he did therefore establish a link between the raid and 'terror' as a whole, he did not explicitly say that he believed it to have been conducted by terrorists.

And over the next few days, the President repeatedly linked the attack to protests against a U.S.-made YouTube video mocking the Prophet Muhammad which were sweeping the Muslim world at the time.

The surviving members of the compound have described the overnight attack, which saw agents trapped in the burning compound before finally speeding away.

As they drove through the crowd, attackers threw grenades and sprayed their armoured vehicle with gunfire from AK-47 assault rifles from a distance of two feet.

Meanwhile, the ambassador was locked in a safe-room as the compound filled with flames.

When the decision was made to escape the diesel-heavy smoke, it was too late, and Stevens never made it out.



**Inferno: Armed attackers dumped cans of diesel fuel and set ablaze the consulate's exterior**



**Siege: The compound came under heavy mortar and gunfire during the attack, which lasted several hours**



Haven: Ambassador Stevens and Sean Smith were hiding in a safe room which later filled with diesel smoke



Flames, grenades and gunfire: A burnt-out car in front of the U.S. consulate

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Was he the producer of the youtube video ?

- [DrWho](#) , Orange, 18/10/2012 18:39

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This is the thanks you get when you go in and liberate them, flag burners retaliating over nothing again.

- [nick](#) , Macclesfield, United Kingdom, 18/10/2012 16:29

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- charlie , herts, 18/10/2012 12:22....how unfait you are....not religions...just religion is enough. Wonder if they will get vexed once again.

- [Ebee](#) , Ramonville, France, 18/10/2012 16:03

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They got their man,he made the film DUHH

- [jtr](#) , manchester, 18/10/2012 15:45

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@Pete the unbeliever - I hope they never hear the missiles coming.

- [James](#) , Manchester, 18/10/2012 15:41

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I thought the mastermind was the poor guy in LA who made the video? Obama told me so.

- [Anne American](#) , The Village, 18/10/2012 15:22

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ROP strikes again

- [sandy](#) , rottendale, 18/10/2012 15:14

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There are a few like him here as well!!

- [shankytee](#) , Liverpool, 18/10/2012 15:13

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Hope they are looking over their shoulders for the drones!

- [Pete the unbeliever](#) , Maidenhead, 18/10/2012 15:06

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People like these give ALL religions a bad name.Isn't it time the MAJORITY had their say,and ALL religions are banned.

- [charlie](#) , herts, 18/10/2012 12:22

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