

November 5

[David Ignatius: Death in Benghazi: CIA timeline of how a tragedy unfolded](#)

Multiple errors were made, but there's no evidence the White House deliberately impeded rescue efforts.

A detailed CIA timeline of the assault on U.S. facilities in Benghazi paints an anguishing picture of embattled Americans waiting for Libyan local security forces that didn't come and courageous CIA officers who died on a rooftop without the heavy weapons they needed, trying to protect their colleagues below.

It's a story of individual bravery, but also of a CIA misjudgment in relying on Libyan militias and a newly formed Libyan intelligence organization to keep Americans safe in Benghazi. While there were multiple errors that led to the final tragedy, there's no evidence that the White House or CIA leadership deliberately delayed or impeded rescue efforts.

The CIA is now reviewing its security plans around the world to make sure the agency isn't relying on shaky local forces. This is a difficult task because the U.S. currently has such vulnerable arrangements in dozens of places.

The CIA timeline was described Thursday by a senior intelligence official. The narrative of events is dramatic and disturbing. Rather than try to parse each detail, here's a summary of the highlights. The time sequence is Benghazi local time on the night of Sept. 11 and the morning of Sept. 12:

- 9:40 p.m.: A senior State Department security officer at the consulate in Benghazi called the CIA base, at an annex about a mile away, and requested assistance. "The compound is under attack. People are moving through the gates." CIA officers at the base can hear the alarm, and a team immediately begins gathering weapons and preparing to leave.
- 10:04: A seven-person rescue squad from the agency's Global Response Staff leaves in two vehicles. The team leader is a career CIA officer and includes a contractor named Tyrone Woods, who later died.

During the previous 24-minute interval, the CIA base chief calls the 17 February Brigade, other militias and the Libyan intelligence service seeking vehicles with 50-caliber machine guns. Nobody responds. The team leader and the base chief agree at 10:04 they can't wait any longer and head for the consulate.

The senior intelligence official said he doesn't know if Woods or any of the other team members agitated to go sooner, but that he wouldn't be surprised. "I want them to have a sense of urgency," he said.

- 10:10: The rescue team reached a chaotic intersection a few blocks from the consulate. Militias gathered there have several 50-caliber machine guns, which the CIA team tries unsuccessfully to commandeer; three militiamen offer to help. The rescue party now includes 10 people: six GRS officers; a CIA translator, and the three Libyan

volunteers.

- 10:20: A reconnaissance party of two GRS officers heads to the consulate; at 10:25, three more GRS officers enter the main gate and begin engaging the attackers. The firefight lasts about 15 minutes.
- 10:40: Members of the CIA team enter the burning inferno of "Villa C," where Ambassador Christopher Stevens is believed to be hiding. CIA officers try numerous times to reach the "safe room," but are driven back by the intense smoke and fire. Small-arms fire continues from the Libyan attackers.
- 11:11: An unarmed military Predator drone arrives over the compound to provide aerial reconnaissance. The drone had been diverted from a mission over Darnah, Libya, about 90 minutes away. But without weapons, it can't help much.
- 11:15: The CIA team puts the State Department group into a vehicle and sends them to the agency base; at 11:30, the CIA officers depart under fire and reach the annex six minutes later.
- 11:56: CIA officers at the annex are attacked by a rocket-propelled grenade and small arms. Sporadic attacks continue for about another hour. The attacks stop at 1:01 a.m., and some assume the fight is over.
- 1:15 a.m.: CIA reinforcements arrive on a 45-minute flight from Tripoli in a hastily chartered plane. The Tripoli team includes four GRS security officers, a CIA case officer and two U.S. military personnel who are on loan to the agency.

They don't leave Benghazi airport until 4:30. The delay is caused by negotiations with Libyan authorities over permission to leave the airport, obtaining vehicles and the need to frame a clear mission plan.

The first idea is to go to a Benghazi hospital to recover Stevens, who they correctly suspect is already dead. But the hospital is surrounded by the al-Qaida-linked Ansar al-Shariah militia that mounted the consulate attack.

- 5:04: The team from Tripoli arrives at the CIA base. Glen Doherty, one of the GRS men from Tripoli, goes to the roof and joins Woods in firing positions.
- 5:15: A new Libyan assault begins, this time with mortars. Two rounds miss and the next three hit the roof. The rooftop defenders never "laser the mortars," as has been reported. They don't know they're in place until the indirect fire begins, nor are they observed by the drone overhead.

The defenders have focused their laser sites earlier on several Libyan attackers, as warnings not to fire. At 5:26 the attack is over. Woods and Doherty are dead and two others are wounded.

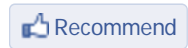
- 6:00: Libyan forces from the military intelligence service finally arrive, now with 50 vehicles. They escort the Americans to the airport. A first group of 18, including two wounded, depart at 7 a.m. A second group of 12, plus the four dead, leave at 10 for Tripoli and then the long flight back to America.

David Ignatius writes about foreign affairs for The Washington Post. He can be contacted at:

dauidignatius@washpost.com

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