

The New York Times

What Sidney Blumenthal's Memos to Hillary Clinton Said, and How They Were Handled

By MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT MAY 18, 2015



Hillary Rodham Clinton, the secretary of state at the time, at a news conference in March 2011 after the London Conference on Libya. Credit Pool photo by Susan Walsh

In 2011 and 2012, [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) received at least 25 memos about Libya from Sidney Blumenthal, a friend and confidant who at the time was employed by the Clinton Foundation. The memos, written in the style of intelligence cables, make up about a third of the almost 900 pages of emails related to Libya that Mrs. Clinton said she kept on the personal email account she used exclusively as secretary of state. Some of Mr. Blumenthal's memos appeared to be based on reports supplied by American contractors he was advising as they sought to do business in Libya. Mr. Blumenthal also appeared to be gathering information from anonymous Libyan and Western officials and local news media reports. What follows are descriptions of some of the memos and how they were handled by Mrs. Clinton and her aides.

Clinton Says Idea on Rebels Should Be Considered

In April 2011, Mr. Blumenthal sent Mrs. Clinton a memo about the rebel forces fighting the regime of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. The rebels, Mr. Blumenthal wrote, were considering hiring security contractors to train their forces. Mrs. Clinton forwarded the memo to her aide, Jake Sullivan, and said that the idea should be considered. (Pages 1-3)

In 2011 and 2012, Mrs. Clinton forwarded 18 memos to Mr. Sullivan, who in turn circulated them to senior State Department officials, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, who was killed in the 2012 attacks in Benghazi, and Ambassador Gene A. Cretz, who preceded him.

Clinton Friend's Libya Role Blurs Lines of Politics and Business

[Sidney Blumenthal counseled Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) when she was secretary of state about Libya, where he was also advising a business venture.

An Alert to Possible Terrorist Attacks in Libya

In May 2011, Mr. Blumenthal sent Mrs. Clinton a memo reporting that affiliates of Al Qaeda in Libya were plotting attacks in revenge for the United States' killing of Osama bin Laden. Mrs. Clinton forwarded the email to Mr. Sullivan, saying that it was "disturbing, if true." Mr. Sullivan questioned its accuracy, but said he would share with others. (Pages 4-5)

Highlighting the Role of a Potential Business Partner

In January 2012, Mr. Blumenthal wrote to Mrs. Clinton about challenges facing Libya's new government. In the memo, Mr. Blumenthal said that Libya's prime minister was bringing in new economic advisers, and that a businessman, Najib Obeida, was among "the most influential of this group." At the time, Mr. Obeida was a potential business partner for a group of contractors whom Mr. Blumenthal was advising. Mrs. Clinton instructed Mr. Sullivan to ask for a response from senior State Department officials including Mr. Cretz, then the ambassador to Libya. (Pages 6-15)

A Memo Is Passed On, Despite Questions

In March 2012, Mrs. Clinton forwarded a memo by Mr. Blumenthal to Mr. Sullivan, saying that she was dubious about its content. Mr. Sullivan agreed, stating that Mr. Blumenthal's report resembled "a conspiracy theory" — but still asked State Department officials to review it. (Pages 16-17)

A Warning Is Forwarded to Incoming Ambassador

In April 2012, Mr. Blumenthal wrote to Mrs. Clinton warning about the imminent rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. Mrs. Clinton forwarded the memo to Mr. Sullivan, who sent it to Mr. Stevens, the incoming United States ambassador to Libya. Mr. Stevens' response — that the

Brotherhood in fact had a relatively small following in Libya — was passed on to Mrs. Clinton. (Pages 18-24)

Clinton Suggests Sharing Information With Israel

After receiving an August 2012 memo from Mr. Blumenthal about how the new Libyan prime minister wanted to have a better relationship with Israel, Mrs. Clinton suggested to Mr. Sullivan that they pass the intelligence along to the Israelis. (Pages 25-27)

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