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Susan rice claims Hillary Clinton was 'too tired' to discuss Benghazi after Libya killings in departing snipe

By [Toby Harnden](#) In [Washington](#)

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Discussing her decision to withdraw herself from contention as Secretary of State, Susan Rice said pointedly that she only spoke publicly about Benghazi because her boss Hillary Clinton had 'declined' to do so.

Rice's comments on five Sunday talk shows on September 16th eventually scuppered her hopes of becoming America's top diplomat after she was panned for stating that the terrorist attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya were caused by an anti-Islam film made in California.

Talking to NBC's Brian Williams about the sequence of events, Rice, who served as a senior State Department official during President Bill Clinton's administration, made clear that she had not wanted to talk about Benghazi that Sunday.



Parting shot: Susan Rice, pictured on Thursday, said Hillary Clinton was 'too tired' to speak publicly about the Benghazi attacks which eventually scuppered her chances of running for Secretary of State



Doubt: U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton may not testify at the Benghazi hearings scheduled for December 20, if a crucial report on the attacks is not finished

Rice pulled out of the Secretary of State stakes on Thursday amid fierce Republican attacks on her, principally over her Benghazi comments, and apparently waning enthusiasm from President Barack Obama for a tough confirmation battle over her nomination.

'Secretary Clinton had originally been asked by most of the networks to go on,' Rice told Williams. 'She had had an incredibly gruelling week dealing with the protests around the Middle East and North Africa that enveloped our embassies.

'She had to deal with the loss of our four colleagues in Benghazi and console the whole State Department, greet the families and the bodies. And she declined to do it. And I was asked by the White House if I would do it as the next senior American diplomat.'

As U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Rice had no responsibility for the Benghazi consulate.

'We were talking about a range of issues that week,' she said. 'It wasn't just Benghazi, as you'll recall. It was a broad spectrum of foreign policy and national security issues that I talk about publicly every day. So I was asked. I was willing to do so.

'It wasn't what I had planned for the weekend originally, but I don't regret doing that, Brian.'

She added: 'I think when you're a diplomat and a public official and a tragedy happens and it is related to the work that you do, it's our obligation to explain it as best we can to the American people. And that's what I did.'

Her final comment about the 'obligation' of a diplomat to explain a tragedy 'related to the work that you do' is likely to be interpreted, implicitly at least, as aimed at Mrs Clinton, whose work related to Benghazi much more directly than Rice's did.



Not to blame: Susan Rice, who withdrew from contention for secretary of state Thursday, said she was not at fault for her comments on Benghazi



Sit down: Brian Williams interviewed Rice about the confirmation process that she said would be disruptive to the Obama administration's agenda in the first months of their second term

Rice made clear her deep disappointment over failing to become Secretary of State, a post now likely to be offered to Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

'I would have been very honoured to serve in that job, just as I'm delighted to do what I'm doing. But, yes, sure. How can you not want to, in my field, serve as at the highest possible level?'

Mrs Clinton eventually said she took responsibility for the events in Benghazi, which left Ambassador Chris Stevens, the first U.S. ambassador to be killed in the line of duty since 1979, diplomat Sean Smith and CIA contractors Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods dead.

Rice was blasted by Republicans, including, most prominently, Senator John McCain, for repeating 'talking points' drawn by by the CIA and other government agencies stating that it was not al-Qaeda-linked groups behind the attack but rather a spontaneous demonstration against the anti-Islam movie.

By opting not to appear on the talk shows, Mrs Clinton appears to have astutely dodged a political bullet that could have damaged her 2016 presidential chances.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, allies of Mrs Clinton were furious when Rice became an early supported of Obama, believing it was an act of disloyalty because she owed her diplomatic career to Mr Clinton.

Rice was Obama's top foreign policy aide during the 2008 campaign, which began with Mrs Clinton as the overwhelming party establishment favourite.

The ambassador added that she didn't think she did anything wrong for saying in the days following the embassy blitz that the attack was random and in response to events happening elsewhere in the Middle East.

Rice said that she believed she had been under 'serious consideration' by Obama for what would have been 'an honour of tremendous proportion' and believed she had not done 'anything wrong' in her comments about Benghazi.

'I don't think anyone is every wholly blameless, but I didn't do anything wrong,' she told Williams, adding that she updated the public with the best information available to the U.S. government at the time.



Answers: Clinton walks with President Barack Obama to the Rose Garden of the White House the day after the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Libya

She said that her withdrawal phone call with the president was very warm and relaxed. 'I think he understood and appreciated the reasons why I made the decision.'

After Rice visited Capitol Hill and failed to placate her critics, including arch foe McCain, there were increasing signs from the White House that Obama did not want to squander the political capital needed to force her through the nomination process in the Senate.

'If nominated, I am now convinced that the confirmation process would be lengthy, disruptive and costly – to you and to our most pressing national and international priorities,' she said in a letter to Obama.

'That trade-off is simply not worth it to our country...Therefore, I respectfully request that you no longer consider my candidacy at this time,' she wrote in the letter.

She made clear that the partisan furore was at the root of her decision, making no mention of the conflict over her answer to the Libyan attack.

'The position of secretary of state should never be politicised. I'm saddened that we have reached this point, even before you have decided whom to nominate. We cannot afford such an irresponsible distraction from the most pressing issues facing the American people.'

Obama's acceptance of her request to withdraw – almost certainly submitted in light of discussions with the White House about the political realities of her situation – indicates that he wants to put the furor over Benghazi, which would have dominated her confirmation hearings, behind him.

'Today, I spoke to Ambassador Susan Rice, and accepted her decision to remove her name from consideration for Secretary of State,' President Obama said in a statement released Thursday afternoon.



Confusion: The U.S. Consulate in Benghazi was attacked on September 11, resulting in the deaths of four Americans; Rice initially said the attack was a random protest and not an act of terror

'While I deeply regret the unfair and misleading attacks on Susan Rice in recent weeks, her decision demonstrates the strength of her character, and an admirable commitment to rise above the politics of the moment to put our national interests first.'

'I am grateful that Susan will continue to serve as our Ambassador at the United Nations and a key member of my cabinet and national security team, carrying her work forward on all of these and other issues,' he wrote.

'I have every confidence that Susan has limitless capability to serve our country now and in the years to come, and know that I will continue to rely on her as an advisor and friend.'

As you were: Rice said she will continue her job as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.



Losing the message: Rice said that with all the mudslinging, politicians forgot to look at the sacrifice of U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens, pictured, who was killed during the attack

Republican concern over Rice had widened with a focus on new revelations that Rice had heavily invested in the Canadian company that wanted to fund the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.

Her financial stake in the Canadian company was not her only questionable foreign investment. She also had stakes in Royal Dutch Shell, whose friendly partnership with Iran would obviously have implications if she were to be the top American diplomat, relied on to impress sanctions on the rogue state.

The political back-and-forth started just days after the election, and Obama addressed the issue during the first press conference of his second term.

'If Senator McCain and Senator Graham, and others want to go after somebody? They should go after me. And I'm happy to have that discussion with them,' he said.

'But for them to go after the U.N. ambassador who had nothing to do with Benghazi? And was simply making a presentation based on intelligence that she had received? And to besmirch her reputation is outrageous. And, you know, we're after an election now.'

Following news of Rice's announcement, McCain's spokeswoman simply saying: 'Senator McCain thanks Ambassador Rice for her service to the country and wishes her well.'

The confirmation process will undoubtedly be swifter with Kerry, since McCain already said publicly that he would back him.

That would trigger a fascinating Senate race in Massachusetts, where Scott Brown narrowly lost his seat to Elizabeth Warren last month. If Kerry become Secretary of State, Brown is widely expected to run to replace him.

Rice could still be chosen as Obama's National Security Adviser, a post that does not require Senate confirmation, should Thomas Donilon decide to step down or be moved to another position such as Deputy Secretary of State.

White House aides have said Obama is now likely to choose either Chuck Hagel, a Republican, Vietnam veteran and former Senator for Nebraska as Pentagon chief. But another possibility for that post is Michele Flournoy, formerly the highest-ranking woman at the Pentagon.

With Rice now out of contention for the cabinet, Obama could come under pressure from the democratic base to nominate Flournoy to replace Leon Panetta as Defence Secretary. If confirmed, Flournoy would be the first woman to run the Pentagon.

Two weeks ago, McCain and Kerry appeared together at a press conference, and the senior senator from Arizona surprised his Massachusetts colleague by introducing him to the press as 'Mr Secretary'.



Presumptive? John Kerry (left) reacts when John McCain (right) introduces him as 'Mr Secretary'

Kerry quipped back at McCain, thanking him by calling him 'Mr President' in return as a jab at McCain's failed presidential bid against Obama in 2008.

'See, this is what happens when you get two losers up here, folks,' Kerry said after taking his spot at the microphone after McCain.

Obama sung Rice's praises in his statement. 'For two decades, Susan has proven to be an extraordinarily capable, patriotic, and passionate public servant. As my Ambassador to the United Nations, she plays an indispensable role in advancing America's interests.

'Already, she has secured international support for sanctions against Iran and North Korea, worked to protect the people of Libya, helped achieve an independent South Sudan, stood up for Israel's security and legitimacy, and served as an advocate for UN reform and the human rights of all people.'

In recent weeks, criticism had also expanded to her record on African policy during the Clinton administration and on her supposedly abrasive temperament.

Senior Democrats claimed that Republican opposition to Rice was based on racism and sexism, decrying the possible spectacle of old white men opposing a talented, youthful black woman for a top foreign policy post.

Fresh from a relatively comfortable re-election and with 55 Democrats in the Senate – just five short of the 60 votes needed to prevent a filibuster – Obama almost certainly had the political capital to force through Rice's nomination but apparently chose not to spend it.



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