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American killed in Libya during protests about Prophet Muhammad video

NBC's Andrea Mitchell reports on the death of the U.S. ambassador to Libya in an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi. The envoy is the first American ambassador killed on duty since 1979.

By NBC News staff and wire reports

Updated at 5:22 a.m. ET: A State Department officer was killed after armed protesters stormed the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, furious about an amateur video that has been viewed as insulting to the Prophet Muhammad.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton confirmed the American's death in a statement on Tuesday evening.

"Some have sought to justify this vicious behavior as a response to inflammatory material posted on the Internet," Clinton said in the statement. "The United States deplores any intentional effort to denigrate the religious beliefs of others."

The attack left much of the consulate burned, witnesses said, and came hours after demonstrators in Egypt climbed the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo to protest the video.

In Benghazi, protesters from various groups joined together to pull down the American flag in the embassy's courtyard and tried to raise a black flag with the words: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger."

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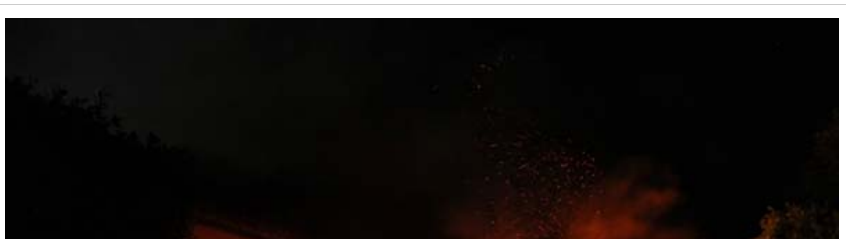
Once the U.S. flag was hauled down, protesters tore it up, with some showing off small pieces to television cameras. Then others burned pieces of the flag before riot police arrived. Most of the 2,000 in the crowd later left. Some reports said warning shots were fired.

The video, clips of which are online, shows a portrayal of the prophet having sex and calling for massacres, the AP reported. It was allegedly produced in the United States.

Egyptian media have been reporting on it for several days, with ultraconservative clerics going on air to denounce it.

Protesters scaled the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and pulled down the American flag during a protest over what they said was a film produced in the United States that insulted the Prophet Muhammad. NBC's Richard Engel reports.

"This movie must be banned immediately and an apology should be made ... This is a disgrace," said 19-year-old Ismail Mahmoud, a member of the so-called "ultras" soccer supporters who played a big role in the uprising that brought down Hosni Mubarak last year.





Esam Omran Al-Fetori / Reuters

The U.S. Consulate in Benghazi is seen in flames during a protest by an armed group said to have been protesting a film being produced in the U.S., on Sept. 11.

Many Muslims consider any depiction of the Prophet Muhammad to be offensive.

Filmmaker calls Islam 'a cancer'

Sam Bacile, a 56-year-old California real estate developer who identifies himself as an Israeli Jew and who said he produced, directed and wrote the two-hour film, "Innocence of Muslims," said he had not anticipated such a furious reaction.

Speaking by phone to the AP from an undisclosed location, Bacile, who went into hiding Tuesday, remained defiant, saying Islam is a cancer and that he intended his film to be a provocative political statement condemning the religion.

Bacile said he believes the movie will help his native land by exposing Islam's flaws to the world.

"Islam is a cancer, period," he repeatedly said in a solemn, accented tone.

NBC's Richard Engel reports from Cairo, Egypt, where a large group of protesters have been gathering since Tuesday's attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that left the U.S. ambassador to Libya dead, as well as three others.

Though Bacile was apologetic about the American who was killed in Benghazi, he blamed lax embassy security and the perpetrators of the violence.

"I feel the security system (at the embassies) is no good," said Bacile. "America should do something to change it."

Bacile said the film was produced in English and he does not know who dubbed it in Arabic. The full film has been shown once, to a mostly empty theater in Hollywood earlier this year, he said.

Morris Sadek, an Egyptian-born Christian in the United States known for his anti-Islam views, told the AP from Washington that he was promoting the video on his website and on certain TV stations, which he did not identify. Early reports suggested Sadek had made the film, but this no longer appears to be the case.

Both depicted the film as showing how Coptic Christians are oppressed in Egypt, though it goes well beyond that to ridicule Muhammad — a reflection of their contention that Islam as a religion is inherently oppressive.

"The main problem is I am the first one to put on the screen someone who is (portraying) Muhammad. It makes them mad," Bacile said. "But we have to open the door. After 9/11 everybody should be in front of the judge, even Jesus, even Muhammad."

Romney slams Obama over attacks on US officials in Libya, Egypt

For several days, Egyptian media have been reporting on the video, playing some excerpts from it and blaming Sadek for it, with ultraconservative clerics going on air to denounce it.

Medhat Klada, a representative of Coptic Christian organizations in Europe, said Sadek's views are not representative of expatriate Copts.

"He is an extremist ... We don't go down this road. He has incited the people (in Egypt) against Copts," he said, speaking from Switzerland. "We refuse any attacks on religions because of a moral position."

But he said he was concerned about the backlash from angry Islamists, saying their protest only promotes the movie. "They don't know dialogue and they think that Islam will be offended from a movie."

An Egyptian state website carried a statement by Egypt's Coptic Orthodox church condemning what it said were moves by some Christian Copts living abroad "to finance the production of a film insulting Prophet Mohammad."

About a tenth of Egypt's 83 million people are Christians.

Embassy condemns those who offend religious feelings

The U.S. Embassy in Cairo had [put out a statement earlier on Tuesday](#) condemning those who hurt the religious feelings of Muslims or followers of any other religions.



Mohammed Abu Zaid / AP

Protesters destroy an American flag pulled down from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, on Tuesday.

"We firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others," the embassy said in its statement.

"Respect for religious beliefs is a cornerstone of American democracy," it stated, adding that it condemned the efforts by "misguided individuals" to hurt the feelings of Muslims.

One slogan scrawled on the walls of the embassy, a fortress-like structure that is near Tahrir Square where Egyptians revolted against Mubarak, said: "If your freedom of speech has no limits, may you accept our freedom of action."

Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.