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and research of John Greenewald, Jr., creator of:

# The Black Vault



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Office of the Director of National Intelligence  
Washington, DC 20511

John Greenewald, Jr.  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

DEC 08 2015

Re: ODNI FOIA Case DF-2013-00205

Dear Mr. Greenewald:

This is in response to your email to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) on 15 September 2013, in which you requested an appeal of your FOIA case DF-2013-00190 regarding information about the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. During subsequent communication with our FOIA office, you agreed to withdraw your appeal and allow us to process the case as a new request (Enclosure 1).

Your request was processed in accordance with the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. 552, as amended, and material was located that is responsive to your request (Enclosure 2). Upon review, certain information has been determined to be currently and properly classified in accordance with Executive Order 13526, Section 1.4(c), and that is, therefore, exempt from disclosure pursuant to FOIA exemption (b)(1). In addition, information has been withheld pursuant to the following FOIA exemptions:

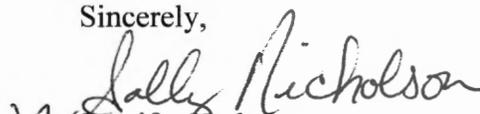
- (b)(3), which applies to information exempt by statute, specifically 50 U.S.C. § 3024(i), which protects intelligence sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure; and
- (b)(3), the relevant withholding statute is the National Security Act of 1947, as amended, 50 U.S.C. § 3024(m)(1), which protects, among other things, the names and identifying information of ODNI personnel; and
- (b)(5), which protects privileged interagency or Intra-Agency information of a deliberative nature.

If you wish to appeal our determination on this request, please explain the basis of your appeal and forward to the address below within 45 days of the date of this letter:

Office of the Director of National Intelligence  
Information Management Office  
Washington, DC 20511

If you have any questions, email our Requester Service Center at [DNI-FOIA@dni.gov](mailto:DNI-FOIA@dni.gov) or call us at (703) 874-8500.

Sincerely,

  
Jennifer Hudson  
Director, Information Management Division

Enclosures

# **ENCLOSURE**

**1**

DNI-FOIA

DF-2013-00205

**From:** DNI-FOIA  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2013 3:23 PM  
**To:** 'John Greenewald, Jr.'  
**Subject:** RE: FOIA REQUEST APPEAL - DF-2013-00190

Thank you. We have issued a new case number for the continuation of DF-2013-00190. It is DF-2013-00205. If you have any questions, please let us know.

ODNI/FOIA  
703 874-8500

**From:** John Greenewald, Jr. [<mailto:john@greenewald.com>]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2013 11:24 AM  
**To:** DNI-FOIA  
**Subject:** RE: FOIA REQUEST APPEAL - DF-2013-00190

That is perfectly acceptable, and I appreciate your time in writing. I hereby withdraw the appeal, and accept that this request be reprocessed under the FOIA, while retaining future appeal rights.

I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your attention to this.

---  
Sincerely,

**John Greenewald, Jr.**  
The Black Vault  
<http://www.theblackvault.com>

**Social Media:**

[ [Become a Fan on Facebook](#) | [The Black Vault Group on Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Scribd](#) ]

**From:** DNI-FOIA@dni.gov [<mailto:DNI-FOIA@dni.gov>]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 18, 2013 8:11 AM  
**To:** [john@greenewald.com](mailto:john@greenewald.com)  
**Subject:** RE: FOIA REQUEST APPEAL - DF-2013-00190

Mr. Greenewald, if you have no objection, we would like to process the remainder of this request as an initial case rather than an appeal. We recognize that there may be additional documents potentially responsive to your request. This will allow you to retain appeal rights.

Please let me know if this is acceptable.

Thank you,

ODNI/FOIA  
703 874-6072

**From:** John Greenewald, Jr. [<mailto:john@greenewald.com>]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 15, 2013 10:50 AM

SEP 19 2013  
Rev'd

**To:** DNI-FOIA  
**Subject:** FOIA REQUEST APPEAL - DF-2013-00190

To whom it may concern,

This is a FOIA Appeal for case DF-2013-00190. Wherein you state that all responsive documents for my request are on the website [www.dni.gov](http://www.dni.gov). Unfortunately, the only processed documents online, were for the talking points memo, and discussions therein via email. This was not the topic of my request DF-2013-00190.

I respectfully requested: *"Specifically, I respectfully request a copy of all emails and means of correspondence, pertaining to the overall situation in, and around, Benghazi, Libya. This would include correspondence from, and pertaining to, the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya along with Ambassador Christopher Stevens. This would include any and all emails and other forms of correspondence from Christopher Stevens, or any other personnel or his staff at the embassy between it, and the DNI. If any other documents are in the possession of the DNI, which the Office of Primary Responsibility is elsewhere, I ask that these records are sent to the OPR, and reviewed for release.*

*I am specifically looking for any and all information about potential dangers of attack, threats against the consulate, concerns, etc. For [REDACTED] for this request for records dating from January 1, 2012 to September 28, 2012."*

Clearly with the dates of the FOIA, this was not include the "Talking Points" documentation. Unless I missed something on the website, can this request be processed according to the nature of the FOIA?

I appreciate your time and consideration.

---

Sincerely,

**John Greenwald, Jr.**  
The Black Vault  
<http://www.theblackvault.com>

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**DNI-FOIA**

DF-2013-00205

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***pertaining to, the U.S. Consulate In Benghazi, Libya along with Ambassador Christopher Stevens. This would include any and all emails and other forms of correspondence from Christopher Stevens, or any other personnel or his staff at the embassy between it, and the DNI. If any other documents are in the possession of the DNI, which the Office of Primary Responsibility is elsewhere, I ask that these records are sent to the OPR, and reviewed for release.***

***I am specifically looking for any and all information about potential dangers of attack, threats against the consulate, concerns, etc. You can limit the search for this request for records dating from January 1, 2012 to September 12, 2012."***

Clearly with the dates of the FOIA, this was not include the "Talking Points" documentation. Unless I missed something on the website, can this request be processed according to the nature of the FOIA?

I appreciate your time and consideration.

---

Sincerely,

***John Greenwald, Jr.***

**The Black Vault**

**<http://www.theblackvault.com>**

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**DNI-FOIA**

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**John Greenewald, Jr.**  
**The Black Vault**  
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DNI-FOIA

Appeal # 513219

**From:** John Greenewald, Jr. [john@greenewald.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 15, 2013 10:50 AM  
**To:** DNI-FOIA  
**Subject:** FOIA REQUEST APPEAL - DF-2013-00190

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**ENCLOSURE**

**2**

Classification: ~~SECRET//NOFORN~~

Upon removal of attachment(s), this document is SECRET

Classified By: [REDACTED]  
Derived From: COL S-06  
Reason: 1.4(c)  
Declassify On: 20371001

(b)(3)

=====

\*\*\*\*\*

(b)(3)

[REDACTED]  
Principal Deputy Director  
National Counterterrorism Center

[REDACTED]  
----- Forwarded by [REDACTED] on 10/01/2012 01:28 PM -----

~~SECRET//NOFORN~~

Upon removal of attachment(s), this document is SECRET

From: Robert T. Cardillo-DNI-  
Date: 10/01/2012 01:00 PM

Subject: DNI Task ref Benghazi

To: [REDACTED]

(b)(3)

Cc: [REDACTED]

This message is digitally signed.

Classification: ~~SECRET//NOFORN~~

Upon removal of attachment(s), this document is SECRET

Classified By: [REDACTED]  
Derived From: COL S-06  
Reason: 1.4(c)  
Declassify On: 20371001

(b)(3)

=====

Team,

The DNI has directed me to stand-up a formal documentation process given the tragic events in Benghazi on 11 and 12 September.

(b)(1)

(b)(5)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(1)  
(b)(5)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

=====  
Classification: ~~SECRET//NOFORN~~

=====  
Classification: ~~SECRET//NOFORN~~

(b)(3)

Matt Olsen  
Director, NCTC

[Redacted]

----- Forwarded by [Redacted] on 10/22/2012 04:41 PM -----

~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI-G//TK//ORCON//NOFORN~~

Upon removal of attachment(s), this document is TOP SECRET

From: Robert T. Cardillo-DNI-  
Date: 10/22/2012 02:24 PM

(b)(3)

Subject: **Benghazi Intelligence Review**

To: [Redacted]  
Cc: [Redacted]

This message is digitally signed.

Classification: ~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI-G//TK//ORCON//NOFORN~~

Upon removal of attachment(s), this document is TOP SECRET

(b)(3)

Classified By: [Redacted]

Reason: 1.4(c)  
Declassify On: 50X1-HUM

=====  
Colleagues,

I have attached the Benghazi Intelligence Review for your information. It represents an IC-coordinated summary of our assessment of the threat in advance of the attack on the Temporary Mission Facility and our assessment post-attack.

This will be provided to our oversight committees on the Hill along with the underlying serialized collection and finished intelligence since 1 February 2012.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Regards, Robert



Benghazi Intelligence Review (IC coordinated).doc

=====  
Classification: ~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI-G//TK//ORCON//NOFORN~~

Classification: ~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI//ORCON//NOFORN~~

Classified By: [REDACTED] (b)(3)  
Derived From: ODNI ANA T-08  
Reason: 1.4(c)  
Declassify On: 20371019

=====  
Received; thanks!

(b)(3)

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

(b)(3)

From: [REDACTED]  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Date: 10/19/2012 11:36 AM  
Subject: [REDACTED]

Classification: ~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI//ORCON//NOFORN~~

Classified By: [REDACTED] (b)(3)  
Derived From: ODNI ANA T-08  
Reason: 1.4(c)  
Declassify On: 20371019

(b)(1)  
(b)(3)

[REDACTED]

~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI//ORCON//NOFORN~~

From: [REDACTED]  
Date: 10/18/2012 11:56 AM

(b)(3)

Subject: **Final Draft Coordination: Benghazi Intellig**  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: Robert T. Cardillo-DNI-, [REDACTED]

This message is digitally signed.

Classification: ~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI//ORCON//NOFORN~~

Classified By: [REDACTED] (b)(3)  
Derived From: ODNI ANA T-08  
Reason: 1.4(c)  
Declassify On: 20371018

=====

ALCON

Attached is the final draft; we need comment/coordination by 1000, Friday (tomorrow) 19 October 2012.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(1)  
(b)(5)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(3)

=====  
Classification: ~~TOP SECRET//HCS//SI//ORCON//NOFORN~~

[REDACTED] (b)(3)

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 15, 2014 5:51 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Breaking Event: Jordan's Ambassador to Libya Kidnapped in Tripoli

Colleagues,

Open source news outlets are reporting the Jordanian Ambassador in Libya was kidnapped by armed gunmen. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (b)(5)

V/r

[REDACTED] (b)(3)

## Gunmen abduct Jordan ambassador in Libya

*LIR2014041530906480 Beirut The Daily Star Online in English 1039 GMT 15 Apr 14 Middle East*

TRIPOLI: Gunmen travelling in two cars on Tuesday abducted the Jordanian ambassador to Tripoli, Fawaz Aitan, in an attack that left his driver wounded, the Libyan authorities said.

It is the latest incident in which Libyan leaders and foreign diplomats have been targeted in the increasingly lawless North African country, three years after NATO-backed rebels ousted autocratic leader Moamer Kadhafi. "The Jordanian ambassador was kidnapped this morning. His convoy was attacked by a group of hooded men on board two civilian cars," ministry spokesman Said Lassoued told AFP. A security official said the ambassador's driver suffered gunshot wounds during the kidnapping. The government in Amman confirmed the kidnapping. "Jordan has initial information that the Jordanian ambassador in Libya, Fawaz Aitan, was kidnapped," foreign ministry spokeswoman Sabah Rafie said, adding that it was investigating. The abduction comes two days after Libya's prime minister Abdullah al-Thani stepped down, saying he and his family had been the victims of a "traitorous" armed attack the previous day. In January, gunmen kidnapped five Egyptian diplomats in Tripoli and held them for several hours. And on September 11, 2012, an attack on the US consulate in the restive city of Benghazi, in eastern Libya, killed US ambassador Chris Stevens and three other US citizens. It came three months after a convoy carrying the British ambassador to Libya, Dominic Asquith, was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in Benghazi, wounding two guards.

[Description of Source: Beirut The Daily Star Online in English -- Website of the independent daily, The Daily Star; URL: <http://dailystar.com.lb/>]

(b)(3)

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** (b)(3) Saturday, July 27, 2013 3:06 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** 27 July 1500 NCTOC Update

Colleagues,

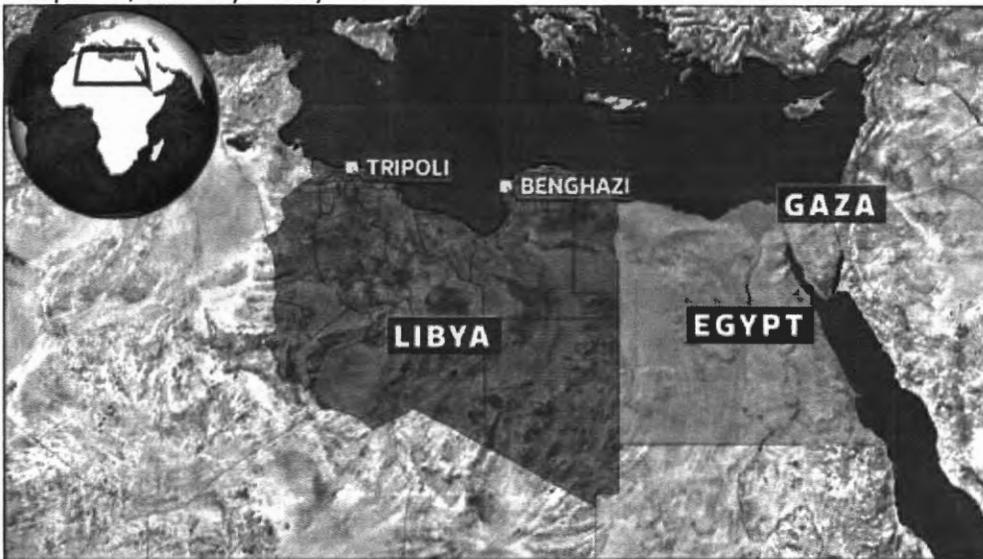
(b)(5)

[REDACTED] The following two press reports are provided for your situational awareness. The first is breaking news on a mass prison break in Benghazi. The second is on another attack on Egyptian protestors today is provided for your situational awareness.

## One Thousand Inmates Escape From Libya Prison

More than 1,000 inmates escape from a prison near Benghazi in Libya as protests take place in major cities.

7:07pm UK, Saturday 27 July 2013



The inmates escaped from Koyfiya prison in Benghazi, eastern Libya

Inmates have staged a major jailbreak at a prison in the east Libyan city of Benghazi as the facility was also attacked from the outside.

Security official Mohammed Hejazi said the prisoners staged a riot inside Koyfiya prison as an attack took place outside the facility.

It was unclear if the jailbreak was part of protests taking place at the offices of Islamist-allied parties in Libya's main cities.

Those who escaped either face or had been convicted of serious charges.

Protesters have massed across the country angry over the killing of an activist critical of the country's Muslim Brotherhood group.

Hundreds gathered in the capital Tripoli to denounce the shooting of Abdul Salam al Musmari, setting fire to tyres and demanding the dissolution of Islamist parties.

Al Musmari, who publicly criticised the Brotherhood, was killed by unknown attackers in a drive-by shooting in Benghazi.

Benghazi's security situation is among the most precarious in post-revolution Libya.

Last year, the US ambassador and three other Americans were killed in an attack there.

It comes after Iraq's prime minister Nouri al Maliki ordered the detention of several senior security officials in connection with a major jailbreak that saw hundreds of inmates escape from the notorious Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad.

A statement from his office said those detained included the chief of staff of the federal police's fourth division.

Al Qaeda's Iraq branch claimed responsibility for the attack and a simultaneous raid on Taji prison. Members of the terror organisation were among the prisoners thought to have escaped.

## Dozens injured in attack on pro-Morsi rally in Egypt's Fayoum

██████████ Cairo [Ahram Online](#) in English 27 Jul 13 Main

[Computer selected and disseminated without OSC editorial intervention]

### Related

- Five killed, more than 100 injured in clashes in Egypt's Alexandria
- Update 9: Mass rallies support Egypt's army; deadly clashes in Cairo, Alexandria Unknown assailants with firearms have attacked a pro-Morsi march in the Egyptian governorate of Fayoum Saturday morning, Reuters' Aswat Masriya website reported.

An eyewitness told Aswat Masriya that a group of young men attacked the pro-Morsi march Saturday morning with live rounds and birdshot. Police then arrived and dispersed the clashes with teargas.

No official account on the injury toll had been provided as of 11am.

Deadly violence was witnessed in Cairo and other cities where rival mass protests were held throughout Friday across the country.

Egyptian defence minister and army chief Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi had called for Friday protests to support the army in "confronting violence and terrorism" following the 3 July military ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.

Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood continues to hold demonstrations to press for Morsi's reinstatement.

[Description of Source: Cairo Ahram Online in English -- Website published by state-controlled Al-Ahram Establishment, launched on 26 November 2010; URL: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/> ]

██████████ (b)(3)

Senior Operations Officer  
NCTC Operations Center



(b)(3)

(b)(3)

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 17, 2014 3:20 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** 17 March 1500 NCTOC Update

Colleagues,

(b)(5)

[REDACTED] The following press item concerning several VBIED detonations in Benghazi, Libya, is provided for your situational awareness.

## Car Bombs Kill at Least Eight at Libya Army Academy in Benghazi

BENGHAZI, Libya Mon Mar 17, 2014 2:53pm EDT

(Reuters) - A powerful car bomb attack targeted a military academy in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi on Monday, killing at least eight people and wounding more than a dozen, hospital and security officials said. Instability in the eastern city is part of the struggle a weak central government faces in controlling armed groups, militias and brigades of former rebels who once battled Muammar Gaddafi and now refuse to disarm. A first bomb exploded at the front gate of the academy as soldiers were leaving a graduation ceremony, security officials said. Several cars parked outside exploded. One or two other bombs exploded around the same time, wounding 18, security and hospital officials said. In a separate explosion hours later in Benghazi, one person was killed when another car bomb went off near the state oil firm Brega Petroleum Marketing Co, which sells fuel products inside Libya, a security source said. No group claimed responsibility for the bombings in Benghazi, where Libyan armed forces have been battling militants from hardline Islamist groups such as Ansar al Sharia, listed as a foreign terrorist organization by Washington. The government called the academy bombing a "terrorist act" and declared three days of mourning, according to a statement. Most countries have closed their consulates in Benghazi and some foreign airlines have stopped flying there since the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans were killed in an Islamist militant attack in September 2012. Gunmen killed a French citizen earlier this month, while police found seven Egyptian Christians shot dead execution-style on a beach outside Benghazi, home to several oil firms. No one has claimed responsibility for that killing. An American schoolteacher was also killed by gunmen in December. Western diplomats are concerned the violence in Benghazi will spill over to the capital, Tripoli.

[REDACTED] (b)(3)

(b)(3)

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 08, 2014 1:12 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** 8 January 0100 NCTOC Update

Colleagues,

(b)(5)

Regards,

(b)(3)

## Former Guantanamo Detainee Implicated in Benghazi Attack

(Washington Post) U.S. officials suspect that a former Guantanamo Bay detainee played a role in the attack on the American compound in Benghazi, Libya, and are planning to designate the group he leads as a foreign terrorist organization, according to officials familiar with the plans.

Militiamen under the command of Abu Sufian bin Qumu, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia in the Libyan city of Darnah, participated in the attack that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, U.S. officials said.

Witnesses have told American officials that Qumu's men were in Benghazi before the attack on Sept. 11, 2012, according to the officials. It's unclear if they were there as part of a planned attack or out of happenstance. The drive from Darnah to Benghazi takes several hours.

The State Department is expected to tie Qumu's group to the Benghazi attack when it designates three branches of Ansar al-Sharia, in Darnah, Benghazi and Tunisia, as foreign terrorist organizations in the coming days.

Qumu and two other men, militia leaders Ahmed Abu Khattala and Seif Allah bin Hassine, will be identified as "specially designated global terrorists," a determination that allows U.S. officials to freeze their financial assets and bar American citizens and companies from doing business with them.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the developments.

About a dozen criminal complaints have been filed in the Benghazi case, with more expected. U.S. intelligence officials have said that several militias had a hand in the attack. Some of the individuals charged are from

Darnah, although it's not clear if they are tied to Qumu's group. Khattala has already been named in a criminal complaint.

**The FBI declined to comment Tuesday.**

**U.S. officials are also investigating whether any of the people involved in the Benghazi raid had a role in the killing of Ronnie Smith, an American schoolteacher who was gunned down while jogging in the city last month.**

Lawless conditions in eastern Libya have frustrated U.S. efforts to investigate the attack in Benghazi and capture those responsible. U.S. officials scrapped a plan to snatch Khattala in Benghazi for fear that American action could trigger unrest and possibly destabilize the Libyan government.

Khattala, meanwhile, has flaunted his freedom, giving interviews to U.S. reporters as the FBI watches from afar. He has denied any involvement in the attack.

Qumu, 54, a Libyan from Darnah, is well known to U.S. intelligence officials. A former tank driver in the Libyan army, he served 10 years in prison in the country before fleeing to Egypt and then to Afghanistan.

According to U.S. military files disclosed by the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks, Qumu trained in 1993 at one of Osama bin Laden's terrorist camps in Afghanistan and later worked for a bin Laden company in Sudan, where the al-Qaeda leader lived for three years.

Qumu fought alongside the Taliban after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001; he then fled to Pakistan and was later arrested in Peshawar. He was turned over to the United States and held at the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

He has a "long-term association with Islamic extremist jihad and members of al-Qaida and other extremist groups," according to the military files. "Detainee's alias is found on a list of probable al-Qaida personnel receiving monthly stipends."

Qumu also had links to Zayn al-Abidin Muhammed Hussein, known by his alias Abu Zubaida, a key al-Qaeda facilitator who is being held indefinitely at Guantanamo. In 2007, Qumu was sent to Libya, where he was detained. The Libyan government released him in 2008.

[REDACTED] - (b)(3)

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** (b)(3) Thursday, May 02, 2013 4:44 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** 2 May 1645 Situational Awareness: CNN Report Attributes Benghazi Attack to AQAP

Colleagues, (b)(5)

NCTOC provides the following report for recipients' situational awareness due to the subject matter discussed. [REDACTED]

V/R,  
[REDACTED] (b)(3)

## Sources: 3 al Qaeda operatives took part in Benghazi attack

By Paul Cruickshank. Tim Lister. Nic Robertson and Fran Townsend  
updated 2:52 PM EDT, Thu May 2, 2013

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

(CNN) -- Several Yemeni men belonging to al Qaeda took part in the terrorist attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi last September, according to several sources who have spoken with CNN.

One senior U.S. law enforcement official told CNN that "three or four members of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," or AQAP, took part in the attack.

Another source briefed on the Benghazi investigation said Western intelligence services suspect the men may have been sent by the group specifically to carry out the attack. But it's not been ruled out that they were already in the city and participated as the opportunity arose.

The attack on the compound and subsequently on a "safe-house" to which Americans had been evacuated left four U.S. citizens dead, including the ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens.

If the AQAP members were dispatched to Benghazi, it would be further evidence of a new level of co-operation among jihadist groups throughout the Middle East and North Africa, counterterrorism analysts say.

According to one source, counterterrorism officials learned the identity of the men and established they had spent two nights in Benghazi after the attack. Western intelligence agencies began trying to track the men in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, but were always behind in their manhunt.

They were later traced to northern Mali, where they are believed to have connected with a fighting group commanded by Moktar Belmoktar, a prominent jihadist leader, according to a senior law enforcement source.

The trail appears to have then gone cold. In early 2013, jihadists were driven out of many areas of northern Mali in a French-led offensive.

Another source briefed on the investigation had previously told CNN that Belmoktar had received a call in the aftermath of the Benghazi attack from someone in or close to the city. Whoever made the call was excited.

"Mabruk, Mabruk!" he repeated, meaning "Congratulations" in Arabic.

There is no proof the call was specifically about the attack, but the source says that is the assumption among those with knowledge of the call. One source says the phone call was discovered when a Western intelligence service trawled through intercepts of communications made in the wake of the attack.

CIA officials told CNN they had no comment on whether any call had been intercepted.

One other source briefed by Western intelligence told CNN a call was intercepted but said only that it was placed to an AQIM commander, not specifically Belmoktar.

Belmoktar is an Algerian terrorist operative linked to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb who claimed responsibility for the attack on the In Amenas gas facility in southern Algeria in January this year. Some 38 people were killed during a three-day siege there.

Chadian troops supporting the French intervention in Mali claimed in March that Belmoktar and others in his group had been killed during an operation in the remote Adrar des Ifhogas mountain range.

There has never been any confirmation of his death, and one source briefed by Western and regional intelligence officials told CNN that Belmoktar may have started operating in the "desert triangle" straddling the borders of Algeria, Niger and Libya.

Belmoktar is believed to have moved to the region in late 2012 after signs that an international intervention in Mali was growing more likely. Known as 'the Salvador pass,' the area is a key transit points for drug traffickers and international criminal groups.

The FBI released grainy photographs Wednesday of three men said to have been at the Benghazi compound on the night of the attack, saying it was "seeking information" on them. It is not known whether any of them are the AQAP individuals.

AQAP is regarded as one of the most active and dangerous of al Qaeda franchises. It has tried to launch several attacks on the U.S. homeland. On Christmas Day 2009, a Nigerian recruited by the group attempted to blow up a plane flying into Detroit but failed because his device malfunctioned. The following October the group attempted to blow up planes heading to the United States with printer bombs disguised as air cargo. The packages were intercepted after a tip from Saudi intelligence. And in April 2012, a British informant working for Saudi counterterrorism thwarted a new plot by the group to bomb a U.S-bound airliner. The informant had infiltrated the group and was selected by them to launch the attack.

AQAP was the first al Qaeda affiliate to comment on the Benghazi attack. On September 14 it released a statement arguing the attack was revenge for the death of Abu Yahya al-Libi, a senior al Qaeda operative, in Pakistan in June 2012. It did not claim responsibility for the attack.

On September 10 -- at least 18 hours before the attack -- al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a video timed for the anniversary of 9/11, called for attacks on Americans in Libya to avenge the death of al-Libi.

In March, Libyan authorities detained a man called Faraj al-Shibli in Libya on suspicion of links to the attack, according to several officials. The FBI was able to interview him in the presence of Libyan officials, according to one Libyan source. It appears al-Shibli was detained after returning from a trip to Pakistan, where he had contact with AQAP members, sources said.

It remains unclear exactly whether al-Shibli was present at the U.S. compound at the time of the attack. It's also unclear whether his detention is likely to lead to charges in connection with the attack. Investigators have learned that al-Shibli has had contact with the Yemen-based al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as well as al Qaeda members in Pakistan, sources said.

The Libyan Interior Ministry refused to confirm he is still in custody, saying it could not comment on an ongoing investigation.

Al-Shibli is the only known suspect in custody in connection with the attack in Benghazi. A 26-year-old Tunisian, Ali Ani al-Harzi, was held in Tunis for several weeks in connection with the assault on the compound after being extradited from Turkey. But he was released by a Tunisian judge in January on grounds of insufficient evidence.

In December, a U.S. official with direct knowledge of the investigation said authorities were examining whether the alleged leader of a post-revolution terrorist network in Egypt had played a role in the September 11 attack. Mohammed Jamal Abu Ahmed was released from jail after the downfall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and is believed to be the driving force behind a new militant group, according to two U.S. officials.

Abu Ahmed was previously a member of al-Zawahiri's group, Egyptian Islamic Jihad. He is currently in prison in Egypt after being arrested in December, when police raided a Cairo apartment allegedly being used by a jihadist group. An associate of Abu Ahmed's subsequently said that he had not been in Benghazi or anywhere in Libya on the day of the attack on the compound.

In the wake of the revolts that have shaken the Arab world, al Qaeda sympathizers have found new space in which to operate, and would-be jihadists have found new causes to embrace. In Syria, the al-Nusra Front has proclaimed its links to the al Qaeda affiliate in Iraq. Militants from Tunisia, Libya and elsewhere have gone to Syria. In west Africa, Nigerian jihadists with Boko Haram have established links with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and trained in Mali.

If AQAP sent members thousands of miles to help launch an attack on U.S. diplomats, it would show that even if al Qaeda central remains under pressure, its fellow travelers are finding new ways to continue its campaign of terror.