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# Interview With Margaret Brennan of CBS

Interview

Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State

Lima, Peru

October 15, 2012

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**QUESTION:** Madam Secretary, thank you very much for making time. The assault on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi lasted well over six hours. Did you at any point consider sending reinforcements or assets from outside of Libya in?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Well, we considered everything, and we did, as you know, send additional assets from Tripoli, but it was a fast-moving, very difficult assault to try to figure out. As you know, the assault on the post ended. There was a gap of time, then the assault on the annex, so everybody who had any responsibility was scrambling very hard to figure out what more could be done.

**QUESTION:** Why not send in assets from outside the country in addition to those coming from Tripoli?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Well, partly because of the difficulties of trying to do that. But I think all of this will be examined in the Accountability Review Board, because after all, we have this independent board to sort through everything: what happened, because we have to get to the bottom of it; what we need to learn from it, because we have to do whatever it takes to protect our people; and then of course to follow up and follow any lead to track down whoever did this and bring them to justice. So we are very focused on finding out everything we can and then learning from it. But we're also, at the same time, doing a very big analysis of what's happening right now, making sure we do what we can to protect people, and it's a terrible tragedy what happened in Benghazi, and we want to make sure that those four men will be remembered because of the changes that we possibly can do to help others.

**QUESTION:** There are people within the Foreign Service looking at what happened in Benghazi and saying, "This shows that there are soft, vulnerable American targets that can be hit." So when you look at your decisions that night, do you expect your own decision not to send in assets from outside of Libya to be in question?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Well, Margaret, I don't want us to reach any conclusions about what we did or didn't do without the full context. I mean, I understand why people want to ask

questions, but I just caution that we need to look at everything, and everything needs to be explained at the same time. We have 275 posts around the world. We have more than 60,000 people. We live in a dangerous, risky environment today in many places around the world, and we are constantly calculating, particularly led by our security professionals, about what needs to be done, where assets need to be. We partner with DOD whenever we can. But it's a constantly calculating analysis that has to go on in order to make the best decisions.

**QUESTION:** And there are usually emergency action plans in place for all those embassies and posts. Was there one in Benghazi?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** There's always emergency plans in place, and there are always constant updates to it. Now, as you know, Benghazi was not a permanent facility. It was a post with an annex, and there's no doubt that it was overrun, some have said in an unprecedented attack that could not have been foreseen and could not have been stopped. But I want to know the answers. I want to know if that's true.

**QUESTION:** So there was not a contingency plan in Benghazi because it wasn't –

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** There's – no, there's always an emergency plan for every post.

**QUESTION:** Okay. On September 16th, Ambassador Susan Rice made a number of TV appearances. Did you approve her speaking points that she delivered on the TV shows that day?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** She got the same information that everyone got, and I think she very clearly said here's what we know now, but this is going to change. This is what we have at present, but it will evolve, and the intelligence community has said the same thing. I've seen this happen over and over again. I mean, you feel an obligation to say something, because something terrible has happened, but more likely than not there will be additional details, what people thought might be changed by new information, or in the case of the intelligence community, something that they are able to pull from their review of all available intelligence.

So I think that what's important is we were attacked. We were attacked, and this was not the only place where our people were at risk. We were facing serious problems in many places over – from September 11th over the following weeks, and what we were trying to do was to stay ahead of it and to try to make sure that we were prepared. In many places, there were governments, governments that have a responsibility under international law to protect diplomatic facilities and were able to do so. In Libya, as you know, they don't yet have control over security. It's something that we are trying to help them with, but unfortunately, they were not able to be very responsive in Benghazi.

**QUESTION:** Who briefed Ambassador Rice that day? Did you sign off on that briefing and those speaking points?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** You would have to ask her.

**QUESTION:** You didn't speak to her before that appearance?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** No, but that – everybody had the same information. I mean, I’m – I have to say I know there’s been a lot of attention paid to who said what when, but I think what happened is more important. We were attacked, and four brave Americans were killed. Others were injured. Dozens had to fight for their life and had to get evacuated. Everybody in the Administration had – has tried to say what we knew at the time with the caveat that we would learn more, and that’s what’s happened. So I think that – I’ve seen it before not just in respect to this. I think it’s part of what the fog of war causes.

**QUESTION:** There are those who because of the vulnerability look at this and say why was Ambassador Rice saying there was no information, which is what she said on CBS, no information that this was a preplanned attack when just days before Libya’s President had publically and repeatedly said there was evidence?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Well, those are all pieces of information that people will have evaluated in the overall assessment. I can only speak for the United States Government and the information that was given was given to everyone. That information evolved. The intelligence community has said that. So I think that we can –

**QUESTION:** It wasn’t an intelligence failure?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** I’m not going to get into the blame game. I think intelligence is very hard to do, and what we’re going to find out as we do this accountability review and we get what will be the best possible chronology that will be attached to what we knew when, which takes time. It cannot be just produced automatically. Then you and the media, the Congress, and others will have a good basis of information.

I understand the anxiety and the desire to try to get answers. Nobody wants to get answers more than I do. These were people who I cared deeply about. I knew Chris Stevens. I asked him personally to be in Benghazi during the Libyan revolution. I personally nominated him to be ambassador, because I could not think of a better person to represent the United States, somebody who understood what was at stake for Libya, what was at stake for the United States, how these revolutions could be so positive or could be hijacked. He understood that, and he was instrumental in working with the Libyans. So I care deeply about what happened that night. I care deeply about what we’re going to be doing going forward. And I want everybody to know that we’re going to get to the bottom of this, and when we do, that information will all be public, and people will be able to draw their own conclusions.

**QUESTION:** And lastly, Madam Secretary, before I let you go, coming up on these last three months of your term, what do you have to do to consider it a success?

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Well, I think we’re just going to keep doing what we’re doing. We’ve had a lot of very important challenges over the last now nearly four years. The world has changed dramatically. We’ve had economic crises, we’ve had Arab Springs, we’ve had all kinds of challenges in places large and small, but I think what’s important is that we have asserted American leadership, American values, American interests, and we’ve also made it very clear that when it comes to our security, it may take time, but if you kill Americans, we will find you,

and we will hold you accountable and bring you to justice one way or the other. And that's what we intend to do when it comes to Benghazi. It's what this Administration, it's what the American people expect. And we will continue to advance our interests, promote our values, and protect our security.

**QUESTION:** Madam Secretary, thank you for your time.

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Thank you very much.

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