

By Gregory N. Hicks - Opinion

[Op-ed: What the Benghazi attack taught me about Clinton](#)

Deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Tripoli shares his view

Last month, I retired from the State Department after 25 years of public service as a Foreign Service officer. As the Deputy Chief of Mission for Libya, I was the last person in Tripoli to speak with Ambassador Chris Stevens before he was murdered in the Sept. 11, 2012 attack on our Benghazi post. On this, the fourth anniversary of the Benghazi tragedy, I would like to offer a different explanation for Benghazi's relevance to the presidential election than is usually found in the press.

Just as the Constitution makes national security the President's highest priority, U.S. law mandates the secretary of state to develop and implement policies and programs "to provide for the security ... of all United States personnel on official duty abroad."

This includes not only the State Department employees, but also the CIA officers in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012. And the Benghazi record is clear: Secretary Clinton failed to provide adequate security for U.S. government personnel assigned to Benghazi and Tripoli.

The Benghazi Committee's report graphically illustrates the magnitude of her failure. It states that during August 2012, the State Department reduced the number of U.S. security personnel assigned to the Embassy in Tripoli from 34 (1.5 security officers per diplomat) to 6 (1 security officer per 4.5 diplomats), despite a rapidly deteriorating security situation in both Tripoli and Benghazi. Thus, according to the Report, "there were no surplus security agents" to travel to Benghazi with Amb. Stevens "without leaving the Embassy in Tripoli at severe risk."

Had Ambassador Stevens' July 2012 request for 13 additional American security personnel (either military or State Department) been approved rather than rejected by Clinton appointee Under Secretary of State for Management Pat Kennedy, they would have traveled to Benghazi with the ambassador, and the Sept. 11 attack might have been thwarted.

U.S. law also requires the secretary of state to ensure that all U.S. government personnel assigned to a diplomatic post abroad be located at one site. If not, the secretary — and only the secretary — with the concurrence of the agency head whose personnel will be located at a different location, must issue a waiver. The law, which states specifically that the waiver decision cannot be delegated, was passed after the 1998 bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa, when deficient security was blamed for that debacle under Bill Clinton's presidency.

When asked about security at Benghazi on Sept. 11, Mrs. Clinton has repeatedly asserted her lack of responsibility. Initially, she said that she never read any of the reporting on security conditions or any of the requests for additional security, claiming that "she delegated security to the professionals." More recently, she stated that "[I]t was not my ball to carry." But the law says otherwise. Sound familiar?

Her decision to allow the Benghazi consulate to be separate from the CIA annex divided scarce resources in a progressively deteriorating security environment. U.S. personnel assigned to Benghazi tried to overcome this severe disadvantage through an agreement that the security personnel from each facility would rush to the other facility's aid in the event it was attacked. The division of our security resources in Benghazi is the root cause of the "stand down" order controversy so vividly portrayed in the movie "13 Hours."

Notably, one of the primary goals of Ambassador Stevens' fatal visit was to begin consolidating our Benghazi personnel into one facility, which would have concentrated our security posture in Benghazi's volatile and violent environment.

There are no punitive measures for breaching these two laws. Mrs. Clinton will not have to appear before judge and jury to account for her failures. Is this why she felt these laws could be ignored? Because she is now the Democratic presidential candidate, only the American electorate will have the opportunity to hold her accountable.

Candidate Clinton and her campaign point to her record as secretary of state as a positive qualification for the presidency.

However, the record shows that Secretary Clinton persuaded the president to overthrow Qaddafi and advocated maintaining a diplomatic presence in Benghazi after the Libyan revolution. And then she abandoned her diplomats by ignoring her security obligations. She sent Ambassador Stevens to Benghazi during the 2011 revolution and then induced him to return in the first few months of his tenure, which accounted for his September visit there. Despite the fact that Sidney Blumenthal had alerted her to the increasing danger for Americans in Benghazi and Libya, Mrs. Clinton apparently never asked security professionals for an updated briefing on the situation in Libya. Either she could not correlate the increased tempo of attacks in Libya with the safety of our diplomats, demonstrating fatal incompetence, or she was grossly negligent.

If Mrs. Clinton was unable to fulfill her security obligations to the federal employees she was legally obligated to protect as secretary of state, how can we trust her with the security of our entire country? I won't.

Editor's note: The opinions and characterizations in this piece are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent official positions of the United States Government.