



Embassy Attacks in Libya and Egypt: The US Needs Assurance That This Will Never Happen Again

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Virulent identity politics are swirling across post-revolutionary North Africa, as seen on full display in Libya and Egypt. Some reports now point to a pro-Al Qaeda group or other extremist elements as responsible for the attack in Libya, planned in advance and unrelated to the anti-Islam video. The protesters in Libya may have been acting separately. There are still many unknown details.

But the idea that a derogatory and clownish internet video justifies mob violence or murder can only be described as barbic.

The U.S. government should make crystal clear to its Libyan and Egyptian counterparts that if they wish to have any relationship, let alone a functional relationship, with the United States in the future, we expect the perpetrators of these acts to be brought to justice swiftly and for sufficient measures to be undertaken to ensure they cannot be repeated. Apologies are not enough.

For its part, the United States needs to figure out what went wrong in terms of operational security, and how the U.S. ambassador to Libya was killed and the Cairo embassy overrun. The past 10 years have blurred the line between warfighters and diplomats, but this experience is a reminder that the two are still distinct.

Finally, although their rights to free speech are sacrosanct and must be defended by all means possible, the filmmakers ought to consider the dangerous game that they are playing. The filmmaker's statement to the Wall Street Journal that he raised \$5 million from 100 Jewish donors to make the film threatens to fuel hatred, and a consultant to the film's admission that

“we went into this knowing this was probably going to happen” are both cold comfort to the deceased’s families and reminders that possession of a right is not an argument for the prudence of every possible exercise of that right.

The United States is a free society in which free speech is respected, but not every American enjoys every exercise of that right. The work of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe infuriated and offended millions of Americans, but the right to free speech was protected and survived. One hopes that this standard can be reached by the citizens and governments of Libya and Egypt soon.