

Susan Rice on Benghazi: 'I Relied on the Information Provided to Me by the Intelligence Community'



Mario Tama/Getty Images

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice defended her actions following the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, telling reporters that her talking points in interviews on the Sunday political shows came strictly from the intelligence community.

"As a senior U.S. diplomat, I agreed to a White House request to appear on the Sunday shows to talk about the full range of national security issues of the day, which at that time were primarily and particularly the protests that were enveloping and threatening many diplomatic facilities – American diplomatic facilities – around the world and Iran's nuclear program," Rice told reporters at a press briefing at the United Nations. "The attack on ... our facilities in Benghazi was obviously a significant piece of this."

Rice was at the U.N. to speak about the Mideast ceasefire deal, which she said the U.S. welcomed, but she took questions from reporters following her prepared statement.

[PHOTOS: Benghazi: US Consulate Attack Aftermath](#)

One reporter asked about the controversy surrounding her appearances on several political shows, including [ABC News' "This Week,"](#) where Rice said that the Benghazi attack was likely spontaneous and the result of protests over an anti-Muslim film. Both assertions now appear to be incorrect, but Rice insisted she was not misleading the American people, as some Republican lawmakers have charged.

"When discussing the attacks against our facilities in Benghazi, I relied solely and squarely on the information provided to me by the intelligence community," she said.

"I made clear that the information was preliminary and that our investigations would give us the definitive answers.

“Everyone, particularly the intelligence community, has worked in good faith to provide the best assessment based on the information available,” she added.

Rice said the ongoing FBI investigation and the State Department’s Accountability Review Board report will become “the definitive accounting of what occurred” on the night of the attack.

Rice is considered the top candidate to replace Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she steps down at the end of her term. But a possible Rice nomination is already facing fierce resistance from conservatives, who have said her actions following the Benghazi attack make her unworthy for the position.

[Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.](#), has said he will do whatever it takes to block a potential Rice nomination.

“My judgment at this time is that four Americans were killed and that the information that the U.N. ambassador conveyed was clearly false,” McCain told reporters earlier this month. “There’s overwhelming evidence that it was completely false, and she should have known what the situation and circumstances were and not tell the world [incorrect information] on all the Sunday morning talk shows.”

At his first press conference following his re-election, President Obama forcefully defended Rice to ABC News’ Jonathan Karl, accusing McCain and other Republican members of Congress of unfairly targeting her.

“If Sen. McCain and Sen. [Lindsey] Graham [of South Carolina] and others want to go after somebody, they should go after me. And I’m happy to have that discussion with them,” said the president. “But for them to go after the U.N. ambassador, who had nothing to do with Benghazi and was simply making a presentation based on intelligence that she had received, and to besmirch her reputation, is outrageous.”

Rice said McCain’s remarks about her are unwarranted.

“Let me be very clear: I have great respect for Sen. McCain and his service to our country. I always have and I always will,” said Rice. “I do think that some of the statements he’s made about me have been unfounded, but I look forward to having the opportunity at the appropriate time to discuss all of this with him.”

She also discussed her personal feelings towards Ambassador Chris Stevens, the U.S. ambassador to Libya who was killed in the Benghazi attack. Rice called working with Stevens a privilege, and said the two worked closely together on Libya’s transition following the fall of its former leader, Moammer Gadhafi.

“He was a valued colleague, and his loss and that of his three colleagues is a massive tragedy for all of us who serve in the U.S. government and for all the American people,” said Rice. “None of us will rest, none of us will be satisfied until we have the answers and the terrorists responsible for this attack are brought to justice.”

ABC News’ Sunlen Miller contributed to this report.



By Dana
Hughes

@dana_hughes



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