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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, September 13, 2012 2:02 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: Wash Post: Hillary Clinton tries to calm anti-U.S. sentiment as protesters storm embassy in Yemen

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Hillary Clinton tries to calm anti-U.S. sentiment as protesters storm embassy in Yemen

By Debbi Wilgoren and Michael Birnbaum, Updated: Thursday, September 13, 11:06 AM

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Thursday tried to distance the U.S. government from a movie that has sparked protests throughout the Muslim world, calling it “disgusting and reprehensible” but also condemning efforts to avenge the movie through bloodshed.

“The U.S. government has absolutely nothing to do with this video. We absolutely reject its content and messages,” Clinton said. “But there is no justification — none at all — for responding to this video with violence.”

Clinton spoke two days after U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans were killed at the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, an attack that analysts was staged by militants to coincide with a demonstration against the controversial movie. Protests denouncing the film have raged outside the U.S. Embassy in Egypt for three days, and demonstrators on Tuesday breached the walls of that heavily guarded compound, pulled down an American flag and destroyed it.

In Sanaa, Yemen, hundreds of demonstrators converged on a usually-sealed-off street in front of the embassy on Thursday for a protest that also turned violent, witnesses said. Protesters stormed a wall, set fire to a building inside the compound, broke windows and carried away office supplies and other souvenirs before being pushed back and dispersed by Yemeni security forces.

“We want to expel the American ambassador,” said Abdelwadood al-Mutawa, a protester who was walking out of the embassy compound. He said he was motivated by reports of the movie mocking the prophet Muhammad. “We cannot accept any insult to our prophet,” Mutawa said. “It’s a red line.”

Another protester said that some of the security forces protecting the building appeared sympathetic to the demonstrators’ cause. “Some soldiers were telling me, ‘These are dogs, and we cannot accept insulting our prophet,’ ” said Yusef Mohammad.

Smaller protests were reported in front of diplomatic offices in Iran and outside a mosque in Bangladesh.

Yemen’s president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, quickly issued an apology to the United States, and ordered an investigation into incident.

“The Government of Yemen condemns any and all acts of violence against diplomatic personnel and facilities,” a statement from Yemen’s government said. “We strongly urge all those that would wish to incite others to violence to cease immediately.”

But the violence in Yemen again raised questions about whether vulnerable Middle East governments are willing or even able to protect American targets in their

countries. It was a further measure of the depth of anger about the film insulting the prophet Muhammad, which was reportedly made in California, although much about its origins remains unknown.

President Obama spoke by phone with Libyan President Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf late Wednesday, accepting condolences for the American deaths in Benghazi and expressing appreciation for the cooperation between the United States and the people and government of Libya in the wake of the attack, the White House said.

In Brussels, meanwhile, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi on Thursday gave his strongest condemnation yet of the attack on the Cairo embassy. He had issued only tepid statements on Wednesday, and his Muslim Brotherhood organization had called for further protests in front of the diplomatic compound.

Morsi said he condemned the security breach “in the clearest terms.”

“I assured Barack Obama that we will not permit any attacks” on U.S. diplomatic compounds across Egypt, said Morsi, who is in Belgium for a visit to the European Union.

But Morsi also denounced the anti-Islamic film that appears to have sparked many of the protests, adding that he had spoken to Obama about it. “I called him to ask him to put an end to such behavior,” Morsi said, referring to the making of the film.

In her remarks, made in Washington during an appearance with the Moroccan foreign minister, Clinton said the United States cannot and should not prevent people from making films that express their opinions. Doing so, she emphasized, would violate the country’s staunch commitment to free and open speech.

“Now I know it is hard for some people to understand why the United States cannot or does not just prevent these kinds of reprehensible videos from ever seeing the light of day,” Clinton said. “. . . Even if it were possible, our country does have a long tradition of free expression, which is enshrined in our Constitution and our law. And we do not stop individual citizens from expressing their views, no matter how distasteful they may be.”

Noting that countless generations of immigrants, including “millions of Muslims” have left other countries for the United States in order to enjoy those same

freedoms, Clinton repeatedly denounced violent responses to offensive speech. She called on other world leaders to do the same.

“We all -- whether we are leaders in government, leaders in civil society or religious leaders -- must draw the line at violence,” Clinton said. “And any responsible leader should be standing up now and drawing that line.”

In Cairo on Thursday, security forces eventually pushed the demonstrators away from the U.S. Embassy onto Tahrir Square – the crucial site of Egypt’s 2011 revolution.

In Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, about 100 demonstrators burned an American flag and chanted slogans on Thursday, including “We won’t accept mocking of Prophet Muhammad” and “Down with American imperialism,” Agence France Press reported.

The news agency said the protesters were mostly seminary student. They gathered outside the Baitul Mokarram Mosque, the largest in the country, but called for more protests Friday and said the U.S. embassy could be the target. Bangladeshi police told AFP that security at the embassy was being enhanced.

In Tehran, anti-American protesters gathered outside the Swiss Embassy, which represents U.S. interests in Iran, CNN reported. The United States does not have an embassy in Iran.

Birnbaum reported from Cairo. Karen DeYoung in Washington and Mohammad al-Qadhi in Sanaa, Yemen contributed to this report.

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