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Subject: Fw: Daily Beast: A diplomat under fire.

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Subject: Daily Beast: A diplomat under fire.

Person of Interest: United States UN Ambassador Susan Rice

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Leslie H. Gelb

A diplomat under fire.

With the presidential campaign drowning in boredom, commentators were desperately searching for news, preferably a new victim, to brighten their days. And along came Susan Rice. A couple Sundays ago, the U.N. ambassador made the mistake of appearing on the talk shows to insist that the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, was “spontaneous” rather than a terrorist plot. You would have thought she had said that the pope was a Mormon.

Out came the Washington daggers. She lied. She was a shill. Benghazi was no spontaneous event. It was the work of an al Qaeda offshoot. The White House had fumbled key intelligence information and was now trying to cover up its unforgivable mistake. Rice was just covering up for the president. Her reward would be Obama’s nominating her to succeed Hillary Clinton as secretary of State.

The commentariat immediately rolled out plans to nail Rice and the Obama team to the wall. Peter King, the Grand Inquisitor of the Republicans in the House of Representatives, pledged to “investigate” and hold hearings. And that, said the commentariat, would be the end of Rice’s hopes to become the new Hillary.

Now, let's take an unfashionable step back and examine the facts, such as they are. Rice did not make up the "spontaneous" story or have it handed to her by White House conspirators. She got it from the same daily intelligence brief given to the president. Those daily intel reports told the very story Rice repeated publicly, i.e., that the Benghazi mob formed more or less on its own, mainly in reaction to the American video cartooning sacred Muslim figures, and that extremists then took advantage to kill, including Ambassador Christopher Stevens. Rice didn't make up that story. The problem was not with Rice; it was with the inevitably complicated U.S. intelligence process.

Her mistake was taking the initial intelligence at face value. The White House briefers made the same error, and so did I. I too repeated in an op-ed on The Daily Beast what the intelligence briefers told me, but I knew very well that more and contradictory information would appear soon enough. It always does.

Sure, the CIA had additional intel from the start, but it hadn't begun to sift through all the communications intercepts, satellite photos, and human reports. It always takes time to sort out facts from fictions and find consistent threads. Seemingly, this gossamer information is now taking shape.

Meantime, Rice is still very much in the running for the job at Foggy Bottom, along with Senator John Kerry, NSC Adviser Tom Donilon, and former diplomat Nicholas Burns, now of Harvard. She was Obama's earliest loyalist in the foreign-policy crowd, and he still likes her, despite lackluster reports on her performance at the U.N. The smears, though flatly inaccurate, won't help her either. What will help her and, more importantly a flagging Obama after the first debate, is hunting down the Benghazi culprits.