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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
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From: Lieberman, Dean
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To: PA Libya; Coordination; SARB; Mills, Cheryl D; Adams, David S; Verma, Richard R; Kennedy, Patrick F; Boswell, Eric J; Sullivan, Jacob J; Reines, Philippe I; Klevorick, Caitlin B
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LIBYA NARRATIVES and MAJOR STORIES – Wednesday, October 17, 2012
 (covering updates from 0700 10/16 to 0600 10/17)

Summary of Selected Major Stories

- **Obama Takes Responsibility for Libya** [WSJ, Langley and Solomon, October 17]
 - Amidst Republican dissatisfaction with S comments of responsibility, President says buck stops with him.
 - President takes offense to charges there were political calculations in Administration's response.
- **Clinton takes Benghazi responsibility; GOP unmoved** [AP, October 16]
 - Situation is increasingly political, as Clinton's comments leave questions unanswered.
- **Founder of Ansar al-Sharia, suspected in attack in Libya, remains at large; revelation underscores how complicated it will be to bring perpetrators to justice** [WSJ, Corker, October 17 print]
- **Brazen Islamic militants showed strength before Benghazi** [Reuters, October 16]
 - Intelligence agencies warned White House and State about dangers of al-Qaeda in region; embassies advised to project sense of calm in run-up to 9/11.

Updates to Ongoing Narratives

- **Security and Requests Before Attack:** The only prominent mention of the security-denied narrative comes from LA Times coverage of the debate, in which they note the President "ducked a question" about who in the administration had denied a request for extra security.
- **Congressional Issues / Partisanship:** For the first time in recent memory, Sen. Kerry has made public comments on the topic, with WaPo reporting that he has taken a tough stand against Romney's politicization of the violence. We normally "bond together as a country and you don't make it political football," he said.
- **Stonewalling / Cover-Up / Shifting Explanations:** While coverage of Benghazi mentions is generally incorporated into larger debate-focused pieces, the most frequently picked-up quote from the President pushes back on the narrative of misleading the American public: "The suggestion that anybody in my

team, whether the secretary of state, our U.N. ambassador, anybody on my team would play politics or mislead when we've lost four of our own, governor, is offensive... That's not what we do." In several pieces and on post-debate analysis on the networks, this exchange is described as one of the sharpest and most dramatic of the debate.

- **Responsibility:** The President's comments in the debate that he is responsible did not garner significant press attention besides a few mentions in broader debate coverage and a headline in WSJ. Even before the debate, there was scattered reporting that, according to campaign officials, the President took responsibility.

Also in the coverage before the debate, the narrative of S taking responsibility continues to be divided by those framing her as the mature and "classy" one in the Administration and those framing her as the political fall-guy. In praise of S, Kathleen Parker wrote in an op-ed in WaPo that "Once again, Hillary Clinton has demonstrated herself to be the classiest person in the room," and that "It is fair and reasonable to entertain the notion that [S] simply did the right thing. The nation benefits from her example." Likewise, Bill Keller, writing in NYT said, "Clinton's willingness to step up yesterday... was the kind of classy move that is all too scarce." In its reporting, WaPo notes while it is normal for agencies to blame each other for events like this, "Clinton absorbed the blame head on." AP reports that some in the Department see her move as "presenting herself as the statesman."

The other interpretation of S comments before the debate – that they were to defuse blame, to take the fall and to play politics – is also present and advancing in coverage. This narrative was pushed by several Republicans (see the McCain-Graham-Ayotte letter and comments by Reps. Issa and King) and led several outlets to run articles along the lines of "Clinton takes responsibility; GOP unmoved," or "bid to shield the President does little to damp the broader GOP push to attack the President." This narrative naturally leads to the charge that the buck needs to stop with the President, not the Secretary, an assertion made by Republican lawmakers and commentators in advance of the debate.

- **Interagency Issues:** The Reuters piece on the strength of the Islamic militants in advance of the attack shines a light on additional interagency disconnect and accusations. Reuters reports that U.S. and allied intelligence agencies warned the White House and State Department "that the regional was becoming an increasingly dangerous vortex for jihadist groups loosely linked or sympathetic to al-Qaeda."
- **Preventing Attacks in the Future / Safety:** No updates.