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US Ambassador Killed in Libya

I'm Avi Arditti with more news in Special English. We spoke with two VOA reporters about the killing of Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans at the United States consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Senior correspondent Andre DeNesnera says an anti-Muslim film incited anger, but knowing who was responsible for the attack may be very difficult.

ANDRE DeNESNERA: "One remembers that last year when the rebels were fighting at that time Col. Moammar Gadhafi, the leader of Libya, there were about one hundred separate opposition groups. And so they are in the process now of trying to consolidate the country and put together a government. Other experts believe it may be the work of Ghadaffi loyalists who are now using that [film] as a pretext for attacking the Americans, who are seen, of course, as the driving force behind the elimination, the death, of Col. Gadhafi."

AA: "So much attention recently has been on Syria, with the ongoing conflict there. What is the situation in Libya. I know you just talked about it a little bit, but how close are they to a government?"

ANDRE DeNESNERA: "Still quite unstable. Now that it's out of the headlines, it's difficult to try to get a reading on it. But what they are trying to do is put Libya back on the footing of a, quote unquote, normal country -- in other words, with the help of the United States, with the help of Europe. But this, of course, when you have the death of four Americans including an ambassador, it is quite a shocking event, at a time when one was more or less lulled into the Arab Spring."

AA: "And you've covered the State Department and diplomacy over the years. How significant is this, the death of an ambassador -- when was the last time?"

ANDRE DeNESNERA: "The last time, to knowledge, was in Afghanistan in nineteen seventy-nine, and there were only five ambassadors who were killed in the line of duty. But what is interesting is that the ambassador was ironically, during the Libyan campaign, military campaign, last year, was the representative of the United States to the opposition groups. So he was a well-known quantity, apparently someone who was well respected, a Middle scholar, and to lose someone of that caliber is devastating."

VOA's Cecily Hilleary has been following reaction to Tuesday's attacks in Libya

and on the American embassy in Cairo in social media from the Arab world and elsewhere.

CECILY HILLEARY: "There are questions as to why we would allow these kinds of things to be aired. At the same time you have Americans saying this is an overreaction, that Muslims are being baited, and Muslims are rising to the occasion, and that this justifies Islamaphobia."

AA: "That they are being baited into -- incited to violence."

CECILY HILLEARY: "Incited to violence, and then the violence feeds ... "

AA: "More violence."

CECILY HILLEARY: "More Islamaphobia. What I'm seeing in social media is that there is a huge misunderstanding between the two sides. This movie was perceived as something mainstream, Hollywood, possibly even government sanction. You know, that's the Arab perspective."

AA: "Which ... "

CECILY HILLEARY: "Which of course it was not. What we know is very little. It's still early. But these are -- they are handheld cameras. This is an amateur production. The full film, to my knowledge, hasn't even aired, just a trailer appeared on YouTube. There are questions as to whether YouTube, a private company, should be held culpable for allowing it to stay on the site. You know, these are interesting questions. In the Arab world, yeah, YouTube would be sanctioned. In the United States, like it or not ... "

AA: "It's very rare for any action to be taken against freedom of speech."

CECILY HILLEARY: "But it opens up new questions about freedom of speech. We are very reluctant to give that up in the United States. And the reaction -- this is a political year. You're immediately seeing the two camps, Obama and Romney, kind of polarizing on social media."

That was VOA's Cecily Hilleary. I'm Avi Arditti.