There are legitimate questions that should be asked of Susan Rice such as her service on the National Security Council

By GEORGE E. CURRY
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Media Matters, the media-monitoring group, has published a report titled, “Myths And Facts About The Right-Wing Witch Hunt Against Susan Rice.” It is a point-by-point rebuttal of some of the most flagrant lies being told about United Nations Ambassador Susan E. Rice, President Obama’s leading candidate to succeed Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. Below are some of the highlights:

MYTH: Rice Fabricated Her Statements As Part of An Obama Administration Cover-Up.

FACT: A Washington Post editorial [11/22/12] noted: “Ms. Rice’s Comments” On Sunday Shows “Were Based On Talking Points Drawn Up By The Intelligence Community.” It explained:

“[A]s congressional testimony has established, Ms. Rice’s comments on several Sunday television talk shows on Sept. 16 were based on talking points drawn up by the intelligence community. She was acting as an administration spokeswoman; there was nothing either incompetent or deliberately misleading about the way she presented the information she was given.

“… Nor was her account of what happened as far off the mark as Republicans claim. Though investigations are not complete, what has emerged so far suggests that the attack was staged by local jihadists, not ordered by the al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan. Officials believe that it was inspired in part by demonstrations that took place that day in Cairo. That is not so far from Ms. Rice’s explanation that ‘this began as a spontaneous ... response to what transpired in Cairo.’”

MYTH: Rice Had No Reason To Connect Benghazi Attack To Anti-Islam Video.

FACT: Rice Said Benghazi Attack Was A Response To Violent Protest At U.S. Embassy In Cairo …

“On-the-ground accounts indicate that Ms. Rice’s description of the attack, though wrong in some respects, was accurate in others. Witnesses to the assault said it was carried out by members of the Ansar al-Shariah militant group, without any warning or protest, in retaliation for an American-made video mocking the Prophet Muhammad.” [The New York Times, 11/27/12]

MYTH: Rice Prematurely Gave A Definitive Assessment Of The Attack.

FACT: During Sunday Shows, Rice Repeatedly Emphasized Ongoing Investigations And Cautioned Against Jumping To Conclusions.

RICE: "…. first of all, it's important to know that there's an FBI investigation that has begun and will take some time to be completed. That will tell us with certainty what transpired.

"But our current best assessment, based on the information that we have at present, is that, in fact, what this began as, it was a spontaneous – not a premeditated – response to what had transpired in Cairo. In Cairo, as you know, a few hours earlier, there was a violent protest that was undertaken in reaction to this very offensive video that was disseminated.

"We believe that folks in Benghazi, a small number of people came to the embassy to – or to the consulate, rather, to replicate the sort of challenge that was posed in Cairo. And then as that unfolded, it seems to have been hijacked, let us say, by some individual clusters of extremists who came with heavier weapons, weapons that as you know in – in the wake of the revolution in Libya are – are quite common and accessible. And it then evolved from there.

"We'll wait to see exactly what the investigation finally confirms, but that's the best information we have at present." [ABC News, This Week with George Stephanopoulos, 9/16/12]

MYTH: Rice Should Have Called The Attack Terrorism Because She Saw Classified Intelligence Suggesting Possible Al Qaeda Involvement.

FACT: References To Al Qaeda Were Removed To Protect National Security …

The New York Times reported on Nov. 16:

"David H. Petraeus, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told lawmakers on Friday that classified intelligence reports revealed that the deadly assault on the American diplomatic mission in Libya was a terrorist attack, but that the administration refrained from saying it suspected that the perpetrators of the attack were Al Qaeda affiliates and sympathizers to avoid tipping off the groups.

"Mr. Petraeus, who resigned last week after admitting to an extramarital affair, said the names of groups suspected in the attack – including Al Qaeda's franchise in North Africa and a local Libyan group, Ansar al-Shariah – were removed from the public explanation of the attack immediately after the assault to avoid alerting the militants that American intelligence and law enforcement agencies were tracking them, lawmakers said."

Media Matters observed, "The article also noted that Petraeus reportedly said that after the references to the specific terrorist groups were removed and replaced with the less specific word 'extremists,' 'the final document was put in front of all the senior agency leaders, including Mr. Petraeus, and everyone signed off on it.'"

There are legitimate questions that should be asked of Susan Rice such as her service on the National Security Council at the time of the Rwandan genocide and her role as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. But her confirmation should rest on her answers to legitimate questions, not an illegitimate political witch hunt.

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