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# Rep. Duncan to Newsmax: Benghazi Questions Undermine Syrian Vote

Wednesday, 04 Sep 2013 07:19 PM  
By Todd Beamon

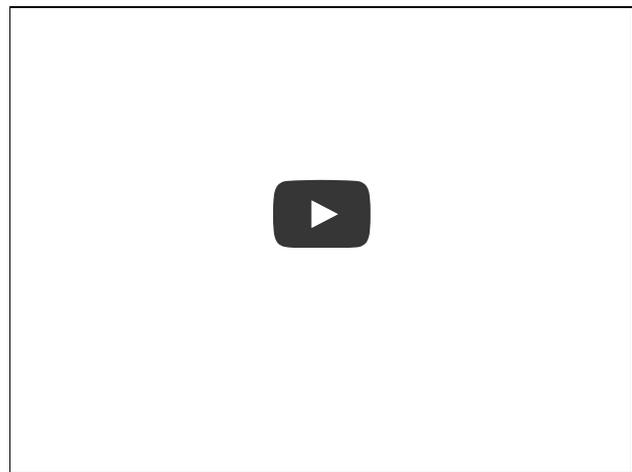
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Rep. Jeff Duncan told Newsmax Wednesday that he tied the four American deaths in Libya last year to Syria in an angry exchange with Secretary of State John Kerry because "the administration's credibility is not real high now because of the failure to bring somebody to justice on Benghazi."

"We don't have questions answered about Benghazi, and then we're going to turn around and put other men and women in harm's way and in something where there is no clear indication of an imminent threat to the United States," the South Carolina Republican told Newsmax in an exclusive interview.

**Story continues below video.**



"He didn't want to answer, and I tried to make the connection between Benghazi and Syria by asking whether weapons were being funneled from the rebels that we supplied them to in Libya to the rebels in Syria," Duncan added. "He didn't answer that question."

Duncan is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee that questioned Kerry,

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Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey on President Barack Obama's resolution seeking congressional approval for limited military strikes against Bashar Assad's Syrian government for his use of chemical weapons on his own people.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 10-7 on Wednesday for a compromise resolution that sets a 60-day limit on any engagement in Syria and that bars the use of U.S. troops on the ground for combat operations.

At the House hearing, Duncan began his exchange with Kerry by saying, "I cannot discuss the possibility of U.S. involvement in Syria's civil war without also talking about Benghazi."

He referenced the botched "Fast and Furious" gun-running scheme that placed arms in the hands of Mexican drug cartels and other scandals facing the White House — and then noted how both Kerry and the administration had advocated caution in similar world conflicts.

Duncan also mentioned Tyrone Woods, a Navy SEAL who died in the assaults last Sept. 11 that also killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and two other Americans, including another SEAL, Glen Doherty.

"Is the power of the executive branch so intoxicating that you have abandoned past caution in favor of pulling the trigger on a military response so quickly?" asked Duncan, who held up a photo of Woods during his questioning.

Kerry, who fought in Vietnam in the 1960s and voted to authorize the war against Iraq a decade ago, shot back angrily: "I volunteered to fight for my country, and that wasn't a cautious thing to do when I did it."

When Duncan interrupted, Kerry said, "I'm going to finish, congressman," and cited his support as senator for past U.S. military action in Grenada, Panama, and elsewhere.

"I'm not going to sit here and be told by you that I don't have a sense of what the judgment is with respect to this," Kerry said. "We're talking about people being killed by gas — and you want to talk about Benghazi and Fast and Furious ..."

Duncan, responding just as angrily, said: "Absolutely want to talk about Benghazi. Four Americans lost their lives. I have sympathy for the people in Syria and I do think there should be a worldwide response, but we should act cautiously."

Kerry noted that Obama was being wary on Syria because "he wanted to have sufficient evidence and he wanted to build the case properly ..."

"... It's been 15 days," Duncan shot back. "That's not caution ..."

Kerry finished out the testy exchange by saying: "We don't deserve to drag this into yet another Benghazi discussion when the real issue here is whether or not the Congress is going to stand up for international norms with respect to dictators who have only been broken twice until Assad: [Adolf] Hitler and Saddam Hussein. And if we give license to somebody to continue that, shame on us ..."

Duncan's time to question Kerry had then run out.

The second-term congressman told Newsmax that he's voting against the resolution authorizing military action in Syria.

"They haven't made a clear argument to me where the U.S. national security was imminently threatened," Duncan said. "I don't disagree that chemical weapons were used. I read the classified briefing, and it looks very evident that they were used."

"Right now, you have a bunch of countries that are signatories to the Chemical Weapons Convention who aren't standing with the U.S. as far as military action," he added. "Where are they? I don't want the U.S. to be standing out there alone."

"We can't even get the British to support military action — and so is there another way to go about this?"

He doesn't think the White House is being cautious enough on Syria.

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"I think they're moving too rapidly, to be honest," Duncan told Newsmax. "I will applaud them for coming to the realization that they needed to come to Congress for authorization. Congress has a role in this under the Constitution."

Duncan said his biggest fear was that American troops would end up in Syria.

"I absolutely fear boots on the ground. I fear an escalation of this," he said. "Assad's already said he's going to attack Israel. They've got surface missiles that could attack U.S. ships. There's a lot of different dominoes that could fall here, and that could escalate this thing rapidly."

"I just want to be cautious and make sure that we take all that into consideration."

The congressman noted it was "interesting" that Kerry invoked Hitler and Hussein during their exchange.

"The United States did not act in Iraq in 1988 when gas was being used on the Kurds or when gas was used in the Iranian-Iraq War," Duncan said.

"Now, all of a sudden, we decide that it is our place to be the police force of the world and act here unilaterally when we didn't act before, and [Kerry] tried to make the argument that was the reasoning that we went into Iraq more than a decade later."

"Saddam was a bad guy. Assad's a bad guy. Nobody's denying that," Duncan added. "Somebody in this regime used chemical weapons, whether it was Assad — an order from him, or his brother, or someone else. Who knows? I don't think the evidence is clear. But it is clear that chemical weapons were used."

"Let's tread cautiously. Let's make sure we've got the facts and try to build consensus for this in the world court of opinion, and with our allies."

He added: "There's the bigger question of who are we helping? On the Assad side, you've got Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. On the rebels' side, you've got al-Qaida and a lot of other operatives that are not friendly to the U.S. who would benefit if we do strike."

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