

**Iowa Press #4002**

**Ken Quinn**

**Original Broadcast Date: September 14, 2012**

**Copyright 2012 – Iowa Public Television**

Borg: Assessing the damage. An attack on the U.S. Consulate in Libya takes lives and American prestige. Insight from an Iowan who represented the United States as Ambassador on this edition of Iowa Press.

Funding for Iowa Press was provided by Friends -- the Iowa Public Television Foundation. Iowa banks know you want honest advice about how to best reach your financial goals whether it is financing an education, buying a new home, growing a business or funding retirement. Iowa banks, Iowa values. [myiowabank.com](http://myiowabank.com).

For decades Iowa Press has brought you politicians and newsmakers from across Iowa and beyond. Celebrating 42 years of broadcast excellence on statewide Iowa Public Television, this is the Friday, September 14 edition of Iowa Press. Here is Dean Borg.

Borg: The attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya killing Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans is still being analyzed. But beyond who did it and why are questions about international diplomacy. Embassies, or consulates, are supposed to be a plot of that nation's soil within another nation, a sanctuary but also an outreach for strengthening relations between the two countries. We're seeking insight from an Iowan who represented the United States as Ambassador living in an embassy, if you will, a nation within the nation. Ken Quinn was U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia from 1995-1999, currently serving as president of the World Food Prize Foundation. Ambassador Quinn, welcome back to Iowa Press.

Quinn: Dean, it's great to be back with you. Thanks for having me.

Borg: We're going to be getting some insight from you on your experience in Cambodia as an ambassador because it will give us insight into what happened in the Middle East.

Quinn: Sure.

Borg: And across the Iowa Press table, Des Moines Register Political Columnist Kathie Obradovich and Radio Iowa News Director Kay Henderson.

Henderson: Mr. Quinn, in what year did you enter the Foreign Service?

Quinn: 1967.

Henderson: Why?

Quinn: Well, growing up in Dubuque I remember John Kennedy talking about if he hadn't been in politics he wanted to be a Foreign Service officer. It seemed like it could be a great adventure. The sense at the end of World War II of America could do so much in the world, there were great things to be accomplished and, you know, for a kid from Dubuque being in the Foreign Service was like an impossible dream. And somehow I passed the test, maybe they got my name mixed up with somebody else's but I got in and I had dreams I was going to be in chandelier ballrooms in London or Paris, Vienna if I had to. And instead I ended up being sent to Vietnam in the middle of the war and my career went off in that kind of direction.

Henderson: In a different direction. You are fluent in Vietnamese, as I understand it. You helped with the so-called "boat people" rescue. And you also, as Dean mentioned, were ambassador to Cambodia. What would you describe as the high point of your Foreign Service career?

Quinn: Wow, that's tough. That's tough. I think the high point was in Cambodia standing at the steps of the Cambodiana Hotel, the city had been ablaze with the fighting, explosions. We had gotten all of the American citizens there. I beat the French ambassador to rent the ballrooms so we had a place for our citizens to go and everybody was safe and I came over from our embassy and American citizens were out there and they applauded for me. What better feeling could there be in terms of your career? Of course, you know my most important thing my family survived when they were attacked. But in terms of your career to have your fellow citizens thank you for protecting them.

Obradovich: That was in 1997, correct?

Quinn: Yes.

Obradovich: And as you mentioned your family was fired upon as part of this uprising in Cambodia. What exactly happened?

Quinn: My wife and three children had arrived from the U.S. on June 17th, belated birthday for me at the residence. We were all sitting around. We had the "Thin Man" video on and all of a sudden explosion hit right outside the window, narrowly missed coming into kind of the living room where we all were. Explosion blew all the windows and then suddenly automatic gunfire erupted all around the house. Turned out the light, threw the kids on the floor and my wife and I laid on top of them to protect them, you know, shield them from a bullet.

Obradovich: And what was the U.S. government's response to this obviously personal attack on its U.S. diplomat?

Quinn: Well, I think it wasn't clear that it was necessarily that they were shooting at my residence. There were a couple of others nearby. But whatever it was, it was civil war erupting.



And so we had to keep our citizens safe. We had no Marines in Cambodia so 150 Cambodian guards all unarmed. So we were fending for ourselves in terms of security.

Obradovich: But the embassy at some point was evacuated, correct?

Quinn: Yes, that's right.

Obradovich: As part of this whole civil war and uprising.

Quinn: Yes, we never abandoned the embassy. We evacuated most of the employees, every American citizen from Cambodia and we had a skeleton staff and it was this close we make the decision we're going to destroy the code equipment, burn all the files and then all of us are going. And we were that close but it didn't happen. We hung on.

Borg: Was that known as an embassy building, the one you're talking about?

Quinn: The one that was hit was my embassy residence. The embassy building was a different compound.

Borg: What I'm trying to get at here, a consulate was hit in Benghazi. What is the difference between a consulate building and the other?

Obradovich: The embassy.

Quinn: So generally an embassy is where the ambassador's office is. It is the central diplomatic home office and place of work for an ambassador. A consulate is an extension out in another part of a country generally where there are more limited services, they do protection of Americans and it has a different status in terms of its standing. It doesn't have the same status as an embassy.

Borg: Is there a difference in security between an embassy and a consulate? Because a consulate was hit in Libya.

Quinn: Yes. The amount of defense there would be is dependent on the threat. Generally the most protection would be at an embassy. And there would be lesser amounts at a consulate. The Marines are to protect the classified information, to keep it secure. Consulates may or may not have classified information in them.

Borg: Are you surprised in Libya in this case at the lack of security at the consulate?

Quinn: I was, I was. I was shocked that there weren't Marines there. But it could be new. I wasn't sure, I don't know the exact status. I've never been there. I haven't looked into it. But if it's a consulate, that is an established diplomatic premise and in a place like Libya where there

has been all this fighting and everything I would have thought there would be American security. Usually we hire Libyan guards ourselves outside, then you have the government protection beyond that and inside you'd have American Marines or American security personnel. So I was surprised at what appears to have been not much security.

Henderson: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has essentially said, how could this happen? As a former Foreign Service officer don't you every day say to yourself, it could happen?

Quinn: Well, I took her to mean how could this happen in a country where we have played such a role in making it more free and letting people come out from under a dictator? But certainly it can happen anywhere. We used to think there were just a few places where the terrorists might get at you but now it can be even in the countries that are our best allies, London or Paris or wherever. So it is everywhere, there's no doubt about that and you have to be prepared and there's so many different kinds of threats.

Borg: And you're talking about threats. I'm going to take you back just a few years when you were on Iowa Press, a few years, more than a decade ago. The attack on the U.S. consulate building this year coincided with what we have come to term, Mr. Quinn, as 9/11 just after that shocking attack in 2001. That is when we had you on in September of that year. And we questioned you on Iowa Press at that time asking why America is so hated in so many parts of the world.

Iowa Press - September 23, 2001 - Quinn: The perception of us as an arrogant country, that there was a lot of hostility grown towards the United States which greatly saddened me. I think it's a combination of that we're prosperous and if you're in countries that are less prosperous there is an antipathy towards those who are rich and well off. We have that within our own country. Beyond that I think there is a sense that we may partner with countries that are adversaries, certainly our support for Israel generates a certain antipathy towards us in the Middle East. There are some who are offended by the mere presence of Americans in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Holy Land, and all of this has combined together one element reinforcing the other and it has built up over the last fifteen years. And just remember it's a new generation. It's not the generation that remembers World War II, that remembers America as the liberator. It's a new generation of people who have this different point of view about us.

Borg: Mr. Quinn, would you change that answer today?

Quinn: Well, I think the part about the generations I wouldn't change. I think that's right. It's even another generation now more removed. I think there is, not justified certainly in my mind, but I think there is this sense of seeing on one side or the other. And America has always been seen as such a powerful element that we're at the top, at the pinnacle and that drew people who wanted to be our friend and who admired us in so many ways and yet on the other hand those who are looking for a reason to not like us. And what I find is when there's not the flow of information where people can't really see what we're about, when they can't understand what



our country is all about they come away with a jaundiced, inaccurate view of us and it is so important then to do things like citizen diplomacy to counter it.

Obradovich: You touched before we went into that video on Secretary Clinton's comment, how could this happen here in Libya where America was so important in helping to liberate that country and you would think that okay, Libya you wouldn't necessarily expect an anti-American uprising and yet we know that that uprising was not necessarily about anger over a video on the Internet. Obviously there is a lot of residual anti-American sentiment in the whole Middle East region. We don't know yet how far this is going to spread. So do you think that we are in better shape as far as American sentiment around the world since the time that you talked to us back after 9/11? Or are we in worse shape now?

Quinn: Wow, that's a tough I guess judgment to just sit and calculate. I like to think that we're in somewhat better shape. We have people coming and going all the time. The power of our universities or such and the great accomplishments. I think there is a huge amount of admiration for Americans and American society and what happens is that, again, not that I agree with it but that policies will become attacked and it doesn't matter whether it's a republican president or democratic president, American policies will be looked at. People who don't like what we do in the Middle East, don't like what we're maybe doing in Southeast Asia or so. I think if you went to, you go to Africa now I think there's a huge amount of good feeling and support for the United States. I think certainly you'll find it in Asia and in Southeast Asia. So these things are evolving but the Internet, the free society, the flow of information, how much different is it from back just even 10 years ago? And that has to have an impact.

Henderson: What sways hearts and minds, in your opinion as someone who has lived outside the country and sees it from a different perspective, diplomacy, military might or humanitarianism?

Quinn: Wow, I think it's the flow of information over time is extremely powerful. That sense of whether it's things coming down the road or going over the airways that is getting there, whether it's the music, whether it's the sense of the culture of how vibrant our society is. I think that sways an awful lot of hearts and minds. For sure some people are affected by economic opportunities. I mean, if you look at China and how it has changed just in my lifetime, in my career in Asia, that it is a much, much greater influence because it has developed so much economically.

Henderson: You said earlier you were surprised by the level of security at that consulate that was attacked in Libya. What other thoughts ran through your mind when you saw about this situation not only in Libya but what has been happening in Egypt around that embassy?

Quinn: Well, I was startled and so sad to think of Ambassador Stevens. Here's a man in the prime of his career, he's there, he's apparently from what I've read was doing -- he didn't run away, he ran to the problem, he came to help other employees not only his American



employees but Libyan employees and to have him -- I thought of his family and what that meant. When I think of the other embassies I see the evacuation, non-emergency people being removed, others that it's so incredibly disruptive to families. It has a certain trauma of its own that hurts. And so the swirling hostility that can exist in these kind of demonstrations of things, they're usually only going to be for a time that subsides somewhat but we had people trying to come over the walls in our embassy in Cambodia and it's that moment of pushing people off or trying to keep -- so there are trying to understand these kind of forces and predict. How can you predict what's going to happen?

Obradovich: This is a complicated situation already but it's happening in the middle of a presidential campaign here and obviously has become a flash point between the candidates. What do you make of that? Does that add to the complication from the perspective of someone who would be a diplomat on the ground?

Quinn: Well, I haven't really -- I'm aware there were some various comments and things and I try to stay away from political elements. But just if you're out in an embassy some place that is ten or twelve hours different from Washington, say as I was, and something happens, whatever it is an incident in or outside, the people are all of a sudden looking to the U.S. embassy for a comment. So we had something like that happen when I was ambassador and it would probably take twelve or fifteen hours to get a coordinated position from Washington. And in the meantime people start imputing, why are they quiet? Oh, they must have been involved. They must have something to do it. They don't care about this. All of these pressures on them. So, in my case, I made, I issued a statement even though I didn't have approval from Washington. I was back in Washington a little bit after that and they had me in and they said, put out your hand and the ruler, a couple of cracks across the knuckles to say don't do that again.

Henderson: So, can you empathize with then what happened in Egypt and the complication of living in a society where Twitter and Facebook are involved?

Quinn: We didn't have any of those kind of things and I just don't know what the circumstances were, what they were reacting to but I just say, I know from my own experience you can get caught in something like that and people can have the best of intentions. If you're out in an embassy and it's really hostile and something might happen then you have to -- if I don't do something or I do something is it going to make it better? Will people be safer? Will the situation be diffused? There was rumor going around the United States was going to rocket Cambodia. And people said it's all over the marketplace. So I had to go out, find the TV, the radio, the voice of America guys saying, I'm making a statement, we're not going to, it's not going to happen, it's crazy.

Obradovich: There is going to be a presidential debate devoted entirely to foreign policy. If you had the opportunity to ask questions, what questions do you think ought to be asked of the presidential candidates about foreign policy?



Quinn: Oh gosh. Well, yes, so I'm president of the World Food Prize Foundation, I'd be talking about is it important to continue U.S. government assistance and leadership in the area of global agriculture and global food security? If you look at between Secretary Rice and Gates and then Secretary Clinton, now global agriculture is at the top of the national security agenda. It started with Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates and now been moved there and finished by Secretary Clinton. I think it's one of her probably most significant diplomatic achievements.

Borg: It goes back somewhat to Kay's question of what's more effective, military might or humanitarian efforts and you're saying I'd emphasize food?

Quinn: I was sitting with Bob Gates and Secretary Rice, Secretary Gates and we were talking about these issues and I was telling them a story about my experience in Vietnam and Cambodia and how we couldn't get rid of the Viet Cong or the Khmer Rouge with bombs, with guns and then we built roads and brought in new Norman Borlaug like seeds in Vietnam and wherever we built a road the seeds would get used, the situation would be transformed in a year or two. And in Cambodia went from 25,000 Khmer Rouge to zero in nine years when we started building roads. And Secretary Gates, with whom I had worked at the NSC stopped me and he said, every one of my commanders in Afghanistan says the same thing. Where the road ends, the insurgency begins. And so I believe that the way, one of the key ways you get at the roots of where these terrible feelings towards our country can get generated is out in these remote places with not much education is how do you build the roads out into them to let the flow of education, of commerce, of human rights get out there? It's not overnight but --

Henderson: The focus thus far of the limited presidential debate that has happened has been on the Middle East. As someone who served in the Far East, are there hot spots there that you think Americans need to pay closer attention to?

Quinn: Absolutely. The whole issue of the South China Sea and the islands that are disputed islands out there which are claimed alternately by China, by Vietnam, by Taiwan, by the Philippines, by Malaysia, even though fairly small and of themselves not terribly significant but they bring with them the 200 mile economic zone and so if it is yours and the oil that is in there and all these blocks of oil and potential gas that are out there and they provide the kind of trigger point that could set something off and if there's not really cooled heads then one thing can lead to another can lead to another.

Obradovich: You mentioned social media a minute ago and, in fact, social media had a big role in the Arab spring, we have already seen some fallout from the use of social media in this most recent situation in Egypt and Libya. And I'm not so sure that the State Department has necessarily changed its machinery that grinds very, very slowly. What do you think it would be like to be an ambassador in that situation today?

Quinn: Well, it certainly was always the case up until the time that I left that we were always several steps behind. I remember sitting with one of these senior Cambodian officials, it was a

very poor government and I had this little cheap cell phone and he had one that you could type on it and this was 1997. And he was kind of looking at me like, how can you be the representative of the United States of America and this is the best phone you could have? So it's so hard to connect things inside the State Department where everybody is worried about everything being classified. So we were always pretty far behind, we were always catching up. Even we bring other exchange diplomats and they would be surprised, the computers were old. But the State Department has been for a long time on a very, very tight budget.

Borg: I'm interested --

Quinn: It's better though.

Borg: After this incident in Libya now there is going to be inevitably, you can be sure an increased emphasis on security. And yet isn't an ambassador, isn't the embassy, isn't the consulate also, as I said in our introduction, an outreach? And is that going to decrease the effectiveness of a United States embassy wherever it is located if there is increased security and a barrier?

Quinn: It is the challenge. It's the challenge of architecture and diplomacy. How can you put the two together? How can you make yourself be safe and at the same time not be living in a fortress, not to be living in a prison hunkered down inside? And so it takes, you have to feel safe there. You have to feel that you've got most of the kind of checks and barriers in place. And you get that with what is called setback. The farther you can be away from the road, you can make it look nice, it doesn't have to be terribly intimidating but you have to have barriers. It's why people built moats a thousand years ago. And so you have to have that same kind of thinking. How do we stay safe?

Obradovich: It's almost startling to watch the pictures in Yemen of people climbing the iron gates. There's obviously no setback there.

Quinn: So I had a temporary embassy in Cambodia, a bunch of old houses, we built a wall around it. When the bombs went in Kenya and Tanzania it became realized somebody drove a truck bomb up next to our embassy. They don't have to be inside, they don't have to -- just drive up, everybody will be dead. It will kill everybody. And so I'm out trying to how do I get the street closed? I'm running to the prime minister, we've got to close this boulevard, we've got to close Grand Avenue, the equivalent. So I got several streets closed. Then there was a gas station. I had to go and rent the gas station from the owner. He realized he had a lot of leverage. \$1.3 million a year to buy all the gas for everybody in Cambodia. So we had a little negotiation and I paid \$300,000. Saved the taxpayers \$1 million.

Henderson: I want to ask you before we leave and we haven't much time left -- President in waiting Xi Jinping has not been seen in public since September 1st. What are your thoughts on that?



Quinn: Wow.

Henderson: Mystified?

Quinn: Sure, I'm wondering too.

Borg: He hasn't been calling you on your cell phone?

Quinn: He hasn't been.

Obradovich: You hosted him at the World Food Prize when he was here.

Quinn: We did, we did.

Henderson: In February.

Quinn: Yes. And we just honored Secretary Vilsack and Governor Branstad for what they did. In fact, I'm editing our new brochure, it's got his picture in there. I'm wondering should I keep it? So I'm not sure. Speculating either is he sick? Did something happen? Is there some kind of security problem, some type of security threat? You can't help but speculate that the Bo Xilai removal, the factions struggling and in the old days they'd be more outright clashes between people in the party. This is a modern age. So I at least wonder if he, there's been some type of threat perhaps and he is just staying, laying low.

Obradovich: He's not hiding in Muscatine or anything like that?

Quinn: I wish I could reveal --

Obradovich: He's in your basement isn't he?

Borg: Ambassador Quinn, thank you so much for being with us.

Quinn: Dean, thanks for having me back.

Borg: We'll be back with another edition of Iowa Press next weekend, same times, 7:30 Friday night and a second chance to see the show at noon on Sunday. Thanks for joining us today.

Funding for Iowa Press was provided by Friends -- the Iowa Public Television Foundation. Support comes from the Iowa Bankers Association. Iowa banks work with you to offer products and advice for financing an education, buying a new home, growing a business or funding retirement. Iowa banks, Iowa values. [myiowabank.com](http://myiowabank.com).

