Benghazi Aftermath

Value statement: Let's remember the sacrifice of these Americans, not reduce their names to political talking points. We must protect and value our diplomats.

On September 11, 2012, an attack in Benghazi, Libya resulted in the deaths of two CIA contractors and two American diplomats, including U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens. The country was already in chaos after the NATO-aided toppling of brutal long-term dictator Muammar Qaddafi the month before.

Key Names:

Ambassador Chris Stevens and Foreign Service Information Management Officer Sean Smith: American diplomats killed in the attack

Glen Doherty and **Tyrone S. Woods:** CIA contractors killed in the attack

Susan Rice: Former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., who gave incorrect information

Ahmed Abu Khattala: Militia member arrested by U.S. for alleged participation in Benghazi attack, awaiting trial in DC

Muammar al-Qaddafi (aka Qaddafi or Gaddafi): Libyan Dictator toppled by Libyans and NATO in August 2011

American diplomats in Libya,

Officials and the media struggled in the aftermath to assemble a coherent narrative of the confusing, tragic events. On September 16, then-Ambassador to the United Nations **Susan Rice gave incorrect information on television**, suggesting the attacks arose spontaneously from a protest of an anti-Islam video produced in the United States, which contradicted some early reports and which later proved false. The violence is now believed to have been **a planned attack by extremists** with ties to Islamist anti-Qaddafi militias, which were gaining power in the post-Qaddafi vacuum.

An alleged leader of the attack, Ahmed Abu Khattala, was **arrested in Libya** in June 2014 and brought to Washington, DC to await trial. He had a routine detention hearing in early July 2015.

The political and media climate was, and remains, both emotional and pedantic. **Legitimate outrage over the deaths of American diplomats mixed with partisanship**.

Then-Amb. Rice was accused of deliberately lying about the circumstances of the attack for political reasons, and Pres. Obama was grilled for his initial choice of terminology: "act of terror" instead of "terrorist attack." The word "Benghazi" itself has become a wry shorthand among the political left for hysterical conservative conspiracy theory.

Recurring questions and sticking points include:

- the motivation for and level of premeditation of the attack,
- if U.S. intelligence agencies had prior knowledge of a specific credible threat against
- if the Department of State ("State") had received, and refused, a **request for additional security** from the American facility in Benghazi prior to the attack,
- if U.S. military assets which could have assisted with a rescue were ordered to "stand down" during the attack,
- if State representatives intentionally misled the public about the motivation for or premeditation of the attack,

In the three years since the attack, there have been **seven Congressional investigations** into the attacks and their aftermath (and an eighth is underway), as well as an FBI inquiry and an internal Department of State Accountability Review Board report. The public results of these **nine completed investigations** share common themes:

- The events did not emerge spontaneously from protests over an anti-Islam video produced in the United States, as some officials initially speculated; it was a **premeditated terrorist attack**.
- There was **no specific credible threat** made against American diplomats in Libya prior to the attack, according to U.S. intelligence agencies.
- State received requests for additional security at the facility in Benghazi in the months prior to the attack, ignoring some and denying others. State had recently reduced the security at the facility, a move which was approved at a 'high level.'
- There was no "stand down" order and U.S. military personnel in Tripoli could not have reached Benghazi in time to help during the attack; this narrative is a favorite of conspiracy theorists.
- Exactly which State officials had what information at what time post-attack remain unclear; however, no investigations have found evidence that then-Amb. Rice deliberately lied. The latest House report found that Rice had seen intelligence to support the CIA's initial assessment that the attacks evolved out of a protest, inspiring her remarks.

• Some investigations found fault with the actions of specific State employees prior to the attack; others did not. Two reports in 2013 called for additional accountability related to reductions/non-approval of increases in security personnel at the Benghazi facility. None of the reports since 2013 have replicated that recommendation.

The bottom line: this case has been investigated a lot, mostly by a Republican-controlled House, and while mistakes have been identified, no great scandal or wrongdoing has been uncovered.

Talking Points

- This tragedy highlights the challenges our diplomats face when they serve as **frontline civilians**, representing our nation in harm's way. Isolating America and sequestering these professionals in fortress embassies is not a solution. We must value and support their important work, as well as protecting their physical security.
- **Benghazi is a tragedy, not a scandal**. At this point, most public discussion is pandering to conspiracy theorists or harping on the death of an American ambassador to score political points.
- These tragic events have been investigated more than the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Reports ordered by a
 Republican-led Congress have repeatedly debunked conspiracy theories of criminal negligence or cover-ups, and media
 coverage has exhausted the issue from every angle. Even incoming House Speaker McCarthy admitted the investigations were
 more about hurting Hillary Clinton than finding truth. We should remember the sacrifice of these Americans, not reduce
 their names to political talking points.
- Some of those most determined to keep this story in the news cycle have a history of hypocritical votes against funding diplomacy and development, the very work these Americans died for.

Questions and Answers

Q: Do you believe Sec. Clinton/the Obama administration endangered American lives by ignoring requests for additional security, and then participated in a cover-up to hide it?

A: Benghazi is a tragedy, not a scandal. Reports ordered by the Republican-led Congress have repeatedly debunked conspiracy theories of criminal negligence or cover-ups. We must learn from what happened and do better, but those still calling for a witch hunt years later, despite the evidence, have clear self-serving political motivations.

Q: Shouldn't someone be held accountable for the deaths of these diplomats? Why has nobody been fired?

A: The same politicians who trade on Ambassador Stevens' name to score political points also, hypocritically, vote to under-fund our State Department and/or threaten to undermine the work our diplomats have done to keep a nuclear weapon out of Iran's hands.

Q: Why wouldn't the President call it a terrorist attack? Do you believe this was an Islamic terrorist attack?

A: Yes, this was a terrorist attack – as the President said within a day of the event. Gov. Romney famously made that same mistake in a debate several years ago; maybe my opponent needs to update the talking points he's borrowing from the failed Romney presidential campaign.

Q: Should we have even been in Libya in the first place/should we have been more active earlier in Libya?

A: We must address the facts on the ground today. We must work with regional partners and promote good governance.

Opposition Argument and Rebuttal

Argument: The deaths in Benghazi were a result of weak Obama foreign policy and callous disregard for diplomats' security requests. In the aftermath, Sec. Clinton and the administration attempted a cover-up of their misdeeds.

Counter: Benghazi is a tragedy, not a scandal. Reports ordered by the Republican-led Congress have repeatedly debunked conspiracy theories of criminal negligence or cover-ups. We must learn from what happened and do better, but those still calling for a witch hunt years later, despite the evidence, have clear self-serving political motivations.