



April 2, 2014

Subject: Full Committee Hearing on Benghazi
Investigation with Michael Morell

Chairman Rogers Opening Statement as Prepared for
Delivery

Today, we continue the Committee's investigation into the September 11, 2012, attacks against U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya, with testimony from CIA's former Deputy Director Michael Morell. This Committee has heard from Mr. Morell on the attacks several times before, but in closed session. Today, we receive his testimony in open session, so the American people can hear directly from one of the most-senior intelligence officials involved in the lead up and the response to those attacks.

We are all interested in Mr. Morell's role in developing the talking points that shaped the Administration's inaccurate narrative about the attacks. We expect he will explain for the public how this controversy developed.

I want to first acknowledge the courageous American heroes on the ground in Benghazi, both those who lost their lives— Ambassador Chris Stevens, Information Officer Sean Smith, and security officers Greg Doherty and Tyrone Woods—and those who risked their lives to save their colleagues. Each of these brave Americans served on the front lines defending America’s interests so the rest of us can sleep safely. We lost some of the best among us on that terrible night.

Many of the brave officers who came to the rescue have testified in closed session before the Committee. These men took extraordinary measures to save their fellow Americans. Without their courage and skill, the terrorists would have killed other Americans in Benghazi that night. Most of these silent warriors prefer to stay unnamed and many still defend America in some of the most dangerous locations around the world.

I thank Mr. Morell for volunteering to testify once again. A terrorist attack against U.S. facilities is a serious event, and this Committee has been conducting a thorough and detailed investigation over the last 19 months to understand what happened. We have held over 17 Member

events, reviewed thousands of documents, and interviewed the men on the ground that night.

I want to focus on how this Committee received inaccurate talking points, and how the Administration used those talking points to perpetuate a false narrative about the attacks.

After the attacks, this Committee immediately sought the truth. We received a closed briefing with NCTC Director Olsen and then-CIA Director Petraeus on September 12th and 13th respectively. After Director Petraeus' briefing, some members of this Committee sought guidance about what could be said publicly in an unclassified form. We knew that our constituents – the American people – needed to know the truth about the attacks.

Unfortunately, the talking points did not reflect the best information available. They did not mention that al-Qa'ida-linked terrorists were involved in the attacks, though briefings and intelligence reports assessed they were involved. The talking points suggested there had been a demonstration, when there had been none and the officers on the ground said so. The talking points were so devoid of

facts or useful information that I dismissed them; I didn't use them. In fact, on September 12, 2012, I said that the attack had "all the hallmarks of al Qai'da." I don't believe any members of this Committee used the talking points after the attacks. As Director Petraeus described, they were useless.

You indicated that you did not know Susan Rice would appear on the Sunday talk shows on September 16th. Your statement implies that you would have written different talking points if you knew she would use them that day.

But Susan Rice used them. As the spokesperson for the United States government, she used them to tell the American people that there had been a protest spawned by an anti-Islamic video. She made no mention of al-Qai'da. She focused on the protest. You told the Deputies Committee on September 15 – the day before she appeared in public – that the Chief of Station reported that there was no protest.

The public needs to hear exactly how those talking points were created. The American people should understand your role.

I must conclude that the White House used your talking points to perpetuate its own misguided political agenda. I believe that the White House wanted America to believe al-Qa'ida to be on the run, and thus they needed the attacks to be in response to an anti-Islamic video. And so the White House used your talking points to say so.

But we knew that al-Qa'ida and other affiliated terrorist organizations and militia groups participated in the attacks. Officers on the ground knew that there was no protest. If the American people had known what those officers knew, if the Administration had told them the truth, the public would know that these terrorists were to blame. The public would better understand the threat we are facing. And our intelligence and defense professionals could have been mobilized with greater speed to find and take these terrorists off the battlefield.

I don't believe the Administration learned the lesson of this failure. Ambassador Rice stated on February 23rd of this year that she has no regrets; she still believes the talking points represented the "the best information that we had at the time." But she is wrong. The White House wants to ignore reality and perpetuate the fallacy that al-

Qa'ida and other Islamic extremists are on the verge of defeat.

Here is why this this issue is important. Al-Qa'ida is growing and planning operations against Americans from their safe havens in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. Yet the Administration continues to talk and act as if al-Qa'ida is on the run. They foolishly focus on the al-Qa'ida "core." But it makes no difference whether terrorists who target Americans are directed by al-Qa'ida in Pakistan or al-Qai'da in Yemen.

Let's also not forget that the State Department ignored ample warnings about the deteriorating threat environment in Libya and rejected requests for additional security support from officers on the ground in Benghazi. And the Defense Department failed to posture itself to protect U.S. facilities that were in harm's way leading up to the 9/11 anniversary.

Benghazi highlights our failures and signals our future. We know the location of some Benghazi attackers, and we have the capability to get them. But this Administration has neither the will nor the courage to take action. They

refuse to act on what we know is true: al-Qa'ida is a greater threat today than it was on September 10, 2001.

Our nation must redouble its efforts against this threat. We must continue to confront the terrorist threat with every tool we have, and with a clear mind about what is at stake. It has been 19 months since four Americans were killed by terrorists and we still have not brought any to justice. This is a disgrace. In the 9 months I have remaining as Chairman, I will continue demanding that the Administration take decisive action against the Benghazi terrorists.