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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Select Committee on Benghazi

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June 28, 2016

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Attached please find a proposed report to be offered to the Select Committee on the Events Surrounding the 2012 Terrorist Attack in Benghazi for its consideration. In this proposed report, the Committee provides recommendations rooted in the lessons to be learned from what happened before, during, and after the Benghazi attacks. In addition to this proposed report and the final report issued consistent with the Rules of the House, the Committee will also seek to make public all witness transcripts, exhibits, and other documents accessed during the pendency of the investigation, consistent with classification and sensitivity issues.

Investigating the service and ultimately the sacrifices of Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty has been a tremendous privilege. So to the House of Representatives, former Speaker John Boehner, and you, my sincere gratitude for the unique honor of learning more about the heroism, public service, ingenuity, and sense of urgency exemplified by these four men.

While the public is familiar with the circumstances of their deaths, it is the manner in which they conducted their lives and their extraordinary sense of service and devotion to our country and the ideals it stands for that leaves the most lasting impression. These four individuals served valiantly and without hesitation in one of the most dangerous areas of the world: post-revolutionary Libya. Though they made the ultimate sacrifice serving our country and we owe them and their families a debt of gratitude, the selflessness and heroism shown by these individuals is in large part what makes the United States the greatest country in the history of the world.

The past two years have led to an even firmer conviction these four men were, and remain, so much more than four images on a television, phone, or computer screen. They were husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, colleagues, family, and friends to scores of people. They believed a life is best spent in service and sacrifice to others and to higher ideals. Our collective

desire for a better world was personified in their actual willingness to try and make it better, despite the risks.

The Committee's investigation has been deliberate and thorough. We interviewed over 100 witnesses across seven different executive branch agencies and the private sector; over 80 of these witnesses had never before been interviewed by a committee of Congress. The Committee achieved historic access to certain types of documents and witnesses. The Committee has discovered a trove of information regarding Benghazi, ranging from simple facts not previously known to large tracts of information which fundamentally alter our previously held perceptions of what happened during the night and early morning hours, when the attacks took place.

As you know, the vast majority of the Committee's work was conducted behind closed doors and therefore out of the immediate public view. This was done in large part due to the nature of the material and to protect classified, sensitive, and confidential information, which demands appropriate treatment. Additionally, private interviews are more conducive to obtaining the most amount of information by allowing the witness to answer questions candidly and without interruptions or artificial time pressures. Confidentiality during the process—a tool employed routinely, if not exclusively, by other federal investigatory entities—is different from confidentiality in the final product. In that regard, and in a virtually unprecedented effort to be transparent, this Committee seeks to make its work public by releasing transcripts and documents appropriately cleared by the requisite executive branch authorities.

It was because of these interviews and the manner in which they were conducted the Committee had a front row seat to the heroism, resourcefulness, and selflessness that epitomizes those in service to this country. Many of these witnesses felt a sense of duty to share their stories with the Committee. My respect for the people who put their lives on the line to serve overseas has only grown after hearing first-hand accounts of what transpired the night of September 11, 2012 and into the early morning hours of September 12.

The CIA force in Benghazi that daringly fought its way into the State Department compound shortly after the initial attack began; the Diplomatic Security agents who risked their lives running in and out of a burning building so thick with smoke they could not even see their hands two inches in front of their faces in an attempt to find two colleagues; the CIA force in Tripoli who, upon learning of the attack, immediately chartered a private plane to Benghazi and arrived at the CIA Annex to provide additional security to our personnel there after a long and harrowing night of fending off multiple attacks by armed terrorists—these men are all heroes in the truest definition of the word, putting the lives of their fellow Americans above their own without hesitation. Many of these men are also quiet heroes—individuals who seek to remain anonymous and will never receive the full measure of recognition they so richly deserve.

This report highlights the unsung actions of these heroes and brings them to light so the American public can better understand the circumstances those serving overseas endure to ensure domestic tranquility and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. This report also details the tragedy that was Benghazi, complete with its beginning, its ostensible

explanation, the decisions made and not made before, during, and after the attacks, and the eminently avoidable ending.

Ambassador Chris Stevens

The story of Benghazi begins with J. Christopher Stevens, a career foreign service officer who was asked in March 2011 to take on a perilous and incompletely defined mission: travel to Benghazi—a city where Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi had promised to hunt down the “cockroaches” protesting against him—in the midst of a civil war and establish contact with the rebel leaders. After weeks of planning Stevens’ entrance to the country, which included delays due to security concerns, senior U.S. military leaders decided no military personnel would accompany Stevens for his protection because of a White House policy of no boots on the ground in Libya. Undaunted, Stevens pressed forward and arrived in Benghazi—the cradle of the Libyan revolution—not on an American vessel but on a Greek cargo ship, the *Aegean Pearl*. Stevens’ reliance on his own ingenuity and the absence of military assets when he most needed them would be a harbinger of things to come.

On April 5, 2011, Chris Stevens arrived in Benghazi. Once there, Stevens, accompanied by only a handful of Diplomatic Security agents, needed to find temporary shelter for his mission of indeterminate length. He settled on the Tibesti Hotel, where he lived for two months until the security surrounding the hotel became so dire he was forced to evacuate and find alternate housing. Shortly thereafter Stevens moved into a facility that would later become part of what would be known as the Benghazi Mission compound.

In November 2011, Stevens left Benghazi to return to Washington, where he awaited confirmation by the U.S. Senate to become U.S. Ambassador to Libya. Stevens would not return to Benghazi until September 10, 2012, the day before the attacks which took his life.

In December 2011, while Stevens was in the U.S., State Department Under Secretary for Management Patrick Kennedy approved a memorandum keeping the Benghazi Mission compound open through the end of calendar year 2012. The memo noted the Mission compound would be staffed by a Principal Officer, an Information Management Officer, and five Diplomatic Security personnel. The memorandum did not mention how the Mission compound would be funded nor what security standards would apply.

Throughout 2012, the Benghazi Mission compound was staffed by several Principal Officers serving 30-90 day tours, an Information Management Officer, and a rotating cadre of Diplomatic Security agents serving 30-45 day tours. Most Diplomatic Security agents serving in Benghazi—almost all volunteers—had no experience in high threat zones, and there were rarely five agents at the Mission compound at any given time. On some days, such as April 6, 2012, when an improvised explosive device (IED) was thrown over the compound wall, only one Diplomatic Security agent was stationed at the Benghazi Mission compound. When a second IED attack occurred on June 6, 2012, only three Diplomatic Security agents were stationed at the Mission compound.

In Stevens' absence, the fledgling Benghazi Mission compound fell under difficult times. It was an off-the-books facility that met no required security standards, nor was it even formally announced to the Libyan government. Witnesses described this temporary Mission compound in various ways, including as an "odd duck" with no clear channels of authority. This resulted in dozens of requests for additional security personnel or physical security upgrades that were ignored, rejected, or pushed off to other organizations within the State Department.

In May 2012, the Secretary of State swore in Chris Stevens to be the U.S. Ambassador to Libya. During a meeting with the Secretary prior to his departure for Libya, Stevens learned of her desire for the United States to have a permanent diplomatic presence in Benghazi, something that had not been the case since 1967. In August 2012, Stevens planned a trip to Benghazi. However, due to deteriorating security, Stevens postponed this trip.

For several weeks in September of 2012, there was a vacancy in the Principal Officer position in Benghazi. Stevens assigned himself to fill this vacancy from September 10 through September 15. Additionally, Stevens had identified a source of funding to facilitate making Benghazi a permanent post. That source of funding, however, would expire at the end of the fiscal year, thus raising the importance and perhaps necessity of Stevens visiting Benghazi before the end of fiscal year, which was September 30, 2012. The Secretary of State was planning a return visit to Libya in October 2012, and Stevens hoped the announcement of a permanent diplomatic presence in Benghazi would be a "deliverable" for her and her trip.

It is clear from witness interviews Chris Stevens loved the Libyan people and felt a special kinship with the people of Benghazi. It is equally clear the temporary nature of the Mission compound in Benghazi directly led to it meeting no specific physical and structural security requirements. It may well be true the U.S. hoped to make the Benghazi Mission compound a permanent facility moving forward, and therefore subject it to specific security guidelines. It is also true, however, the Benghazi Mission compound met no such standards or guidelines in September 2012, and as Washington's attention toward Libya and Benghazi waned, the security situation in this post-revolutionary country was deteriorating rapidly.

When Stevens arrived in Benghazi on September 10, 2012, he was given a security briefing by the CIA at its Annex in Benghazi. This provided Stevens yet another reminder of how the post-revolutionary security environment was falling apart. As a result of this security briefing by the CIA, Stevens altered his schedule for the following day and decided to hold all of his meetings at the Benghazi Mission compound. This decision to limit off-Mission compound travel was a function of both the deteriorating security situation in Benghazi generally but also a reflection of what limited resources were available to adequately protect both the physical property of the compound as well as the Ambassador's off-compound movements.

On September 1, 2012, Sean Smith traveled to Benghazi to fill the role of Information Management Officer. Smith, stationed in The Netherlands, was a devoted husband, father of two, an only child and an avid and expert online gamer. Early in the morning on September 11, 2012, agents at the Benghazi Mission compound spotted someone surveilling the compound

from across the street. After this incident, Smith wrote to his friends online, “assuming we don’t die tonight . . . “

The Attacks in Benghazi

At 9:42 p.m. on September 11, 2012, the Benghazi Mission compound came under attack. Diplomatic Security agents immediately relayed this information to the CIA Annex, where five GRS officers, including Tyrone Woods, ran to their equipment room to don body armor and gather weapons to respond to the attack. Within minutes the GRS personnel were ready to go and join the fight and defend the U.S. facility. This was true even though these GRS personnel did not know exactly what was transpiring at the Mission Compound, who the enemy may be, or how many attackers there were. In sum, their initial and only reaction to the plaintive call for help from other Americans was to go. After a delay where the head of the Annex was trying to muster local Libyan forces to support the GRS, these individuals—including the GRS team lead and a translator—left the Annex to head towards the Mission compound. The courage shown by these individuals, launching themselves into a firefight without reservation, represents the best of what this country has to offer.

At the Mission compound, Diplomatic Security personnel showed similar fortitude. One of the buildings had been set on fire and the smoke, as a result of burning diesel fuel, was thick and toxic. Ambassador Stevens and Sean Smith were both missing, trapped inside the burning building. Over and over the Diplomatic Security agents went into the building, risking their own lives, in an attempt to find Stevens and Smith. Their lungs filled with smoke, their eyes impacted by the heat, and their bodies were covered in soot and ash. They gasped for breath as they repeatedly tried to find their missing colleagues, knowing full well each step taken toward the interior of the burning building was a step farther away from their own safety. Only one individual, Sean Smith, was found. His body was carried out of the building, and the agents were unable to save him. The agents were unable to locate Ambassador Stevens, who became missing.

Upon arriving at the Benghazi Mission compound, the GRS personnel evaded enemy fire and also assisted in trying to locate the missing Ambassador, running into the burning building over and over in a futile attempt to find him. The GRS and Diplomatic Security personnel eventually evacuated the Compound as enemy fire from the attackers became more intense. After leaving the Compound in a heavily armored car, Diplomatic Security personnel were ambushed and followed back to the CIA Annex. This ambush was coordinated and consisted of grenades and point blank machine gun fire.

GRS personnel also left the Compound to head back to the Annex. GRS personnel and Diplomatic Security agents returned to the CIA Annex for at least two reasons: first, the gunfight at the Mission compound was intense, and the local Libyans who were supposed to respond in situations such as this were nowhere to be found; second, GRS personnel were not responsible for the security of State Department facilities—that was a function of the State Department. The GRS personnel rendered aid because fellow Americans needed them. But their decision to leave

the CIA Annex and provide aid at the Mission compound meant the Annex was potentially vulnerable to its own attack.

As the GRS personnel and the Diplomatic Security agents moved from the Mission compound to the Annex—including encountering an ambush along the way—so, too, did the attackers. Around midnight a wave of attackers approached the Annex, but due to fortified security the GRS personnel were able to fend off the attack. About an hour later, a heavier attack was launched against the Annex, but once again security personnel were able to keep the attackers at bay.

In Tripoli, CIA and Defense Department personnel, including Glen Doherty, demonstrated a sense of urgency, gumption, and valor as well. Immediately upon hearing about the attacks on the Benghazi Mission compound, five CIA personnel, including a translator, joined two Department of Defense special operators and traveled to the airport in Tripoli to charter a private plane to Benghazi to assist their fellow Americans. Upon arriving in Benghazi, however, this team was forced to wait nearly three hours for transportation, despite negotiating with several local Libyan militias. While at the airport, the team from Tripoli learned the Ambassador may be at a local hospital and tried to procure transportation there. They were unsuccessful. Still at the Benghazi airport, the team from Tripoli also learned information indicating some of the attackers at the Benghazi Mission compound were some of the very Libyans at the airport.

Eventually the team from Tripoli was able to arrange transportation by the Libya Shield militia from the Benghazi airport to the CIA Annex. Upon arriving at the Annex around 5:00 a.m., the Libya Shield vehicles parked outside while the militia's subcommander, who was in charge of the transportation, was escorted into the Annex and eventually into the secured space in one of the buildings in the Annex. Approximately ten minutes later several rounds of mortars struck the Annex, including three with direct hits on the roof of the building where the secured space was located. These mortars killed Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty and severely wounded two other Americans.

After the first mortar attack, the Libya Shield militia departed the Annex; they had been told by their senior commander to return to the other side of town to gather more weapons. That same commander was seen with Abu Khatallah—the only person to date indicted in connection with the Benghazi attacks—earlier that evening outside the Benghazi Mission compound.

After the mortar attacks struck, one CIA individual from Tripoli attended to the two severely wounded Americans. But for this heroic and decisive action, six Americans would have died that night instead of four.

With two severely wounded and two additional Americans dead—Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, in addition to Sean Smith and Ambassador Chris Stevens, who had been confirmed deceased just an hour earlier—the CIA Annex fell silent. To those on the ground, a palpable fear filled the air that a larger force would soon attack. Daylight was imminent, taking

away the advantage of night vision goggles the CIA personnel had over their attackers. With over 30 Americans at the Annex, an evacuation to the Benghazi airport was impossible.

Due to the persistence of a single CIA case officer, however, help did come for the Americans. At the onset of the initial attacks on the Mission compound this case officer asked for help from local Libyan militias with whom the CIA had established connections. That help never came. But this CIA case officer—who no other committee of Congress or the Accountability Review Board interviewed—worked the phones all evening leading to a break. A group called Libyan Military Intelligence—made up of former senior Qadhafi regime officials who went underground for fear of being assassinated, and thus unfamiliar to the CIA—came to the aid of the Americans, sending roughly 50 gun trucks to the Annex to help evacuate the Americans to the airport.

At the airport, the first set of Americans took the plane chartered from Tripoli to Benghazi back to Tripoli. After this plane departed, the body of Ambassador Stevens arrived at the airport, and shortly thereafter a Libyan C-130 arrived to take the remaining Americans to Tripoli. No U.S. aircraft aided in the evacuation of U.S. personnel or remains from Benghazi to Tripoli because no U.S. aircraft ever made it to Benghazi. This was true, as the Committee learned, because no U.S. aircraft was ever going to Benghazi, despite an order from Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta.

Indecision in Washington

When the attacks began, it was 3:42 p.m. in Washington D.C. The Secretary of Defense first learned of the attacks in Benghazi shortly before he left the Pentagon for a previously scheduled 5:00 p.m. meeting with the President. After arriving at the White House, the Secretary discussed the attacks with the Commander-in-Chief, who ordered the Secretary to do everything he could to help the Americans under fire in Benghazi.

Secretary Panetta returned to the Pentagon to meet with his senior staff. At that meeting, three forces were identified to respond to the emerging crisis: a Fleet Antiterrorism Support Team (FAST) in Rota, Spain; the United States European Command Commander's In Extremis Force (CIF), which was conducting a training mission in Croatia; and a United States-based special operations force (SOF). Around 7:00 p.m. Secretary Panetta ordered these three forces to be deployed. It was not until 8:39 p.m., however, when the Defense Department relayed the orders to the military chain of command.

Despite Secretary Panetta's orders, the White House scheduled a secure videoconference meeting for 7:30 p.m. with senior officials in the State Department, Defense Department, and intelligence community to discuss the attacks in Benghazi and the U.S. government's response. At this meeting, which lasted for the next two hours, those senior officials discussed several topics, including a YouTube video which, until that night, had prompted little action by the administration.

Just the day before, administration officials had discussed the video and its role in an upcoming protest that was planned to occur outside the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. Yet, nothing about that impending protest or the video prompted changes in the posture of the U.S. military. Even after the protests in Cairo began on September 11, 2012—just hours before the attacks in Benghazi—and even after protestors had stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, scaled the Embassy walls and taken down the American flag, the administration took no action. Yet, during a meeting ostensibly called to discuss the administration's response to the ongoing and lethal attacks in Benghazi, much of the focus of the meeting was centered on this video—not on the American lives hanging in the balance in Benghazi. This was true despite there being no evidence, absent errant news reports, the video was connected with what was occurring in Benghazi.

When the focus of the White House meeting shifted to which military forces would deploy to Libya, however, senior officials from the State Department voiced surprising concern about the Libyan Government's reaction to the size and scale of the forces the Secretary of Defense had ordered to deploy. The State Department even expressed concern about what the U.S. military personnel would wear when they entered Libya. A White House official participating in the meeting recognized the superfluous timing of these discussions and remarked, "The time for being overly sensitive to Libyan concerns about military appearances seems to be over." It was, after all, the same Libyan government who failed to provide the security required of host nations before the attacks began and the same Libyan government who largely failed to respond in any meaningful way during the pendency of the ongoing attacks.

The White House meeting impacted the military response to Benghazi. No one who participated in the White House meeting was in the chain of command to deploy forces. Yet, as a result of the meeting, directions were given to not send forces to Benghazi—despite the Secretary of Defense's order otherwise. As a result of the meeting, directions were given to send forces to an intermediate staging base and to send forces to Tripoli, Libya.

The Defense Department leaders believed the Americans at the Annex were planning to evacuate to Tripoli hours before the mortar attacks occurred. The Defense Department leaders also believed after the initial attack at the Benghazi Mission compound the attacks had largely subsided. While neither the CIA nor the State Department—both of whom had personnel in the thick of battle in Benghazi—shared the belief that everybody was evacuating or that the attacks had largely subsided, those beliefs impacted the Defense Department's decisions that night, including which forces to deploy and how quickly those forces would move.

At 8:39 p.m., five hours after the attacks in Benghazi began and almost two hours after the Secretary of Defense issued his order to deploy, an order was conveyed to the CIF, the FAST, and the SOF. However, Secretary Panetta's orders to deploy were not conveyed to these forces, but rather an order to "prepare to deploy."

In addition, the forces were not postured to respond quickly. None of the three forces identified to respond to the Benghazi attacks—the CIF, the FAST, or the SOF—deployed within their required timeframe. They all missed their deadlines.

The CIF was completing a training mission in Croatia. Although the CIF Commander and his troops were quickly packed and ready to deploy, the CIF waited nine hours for its airplanes to arrive. Unknown to the CIF Commander, the CIF's pilots had been placed on crew rest for eight hours.

The FAST, too, quickly packed and was ready to deploy, but waited three hours for airplanes to arrive from Germany. The FAST spent another three hours after the airplanes arrived changing from uniforms to civilian clothes and back to uniforms, changing four times before finally deploying to Tripoli, not Benghazi. In fact, the FAST was so delayed arriving in Tripoli that the SOF—traveling from the United States—arrived to its destination in Italy only thirty minutes after the FAST, traveling from Spain, arrived in Tripoli.

While the FAST and the CIF were waiting for airplanes to arrive to carry them onward, the Americans at the Annex in Benghazi experienced a deadly assault. Several direct mortar strikes left two more Americans dead and two severely injured. Despite the fact that nearly eight hours had elapsed since the first attacks began, and nearly four hours had elapsed since the Secretary of Defense had ordered forces to deploy, at the time of the mortar attacks not one wheel was actually turning towards Libya. Not a single one of those forces had even moved.

Explanation of the Attacks to the American People

On the night of the attacks, September 11, 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered the only official statement from the U.S. government regarding the attacks. At the time the statement was released, the Secretary's office had real-time information about the attacks from multiple sources: from the Diplomatic Security agents on the ground in Benghazi via the Diplomatic Security Command Center and the Under Secretary for Management, and from the Deputy Chief of Mission in Libya via a call with the Secretary and other senior State Department officials. The Office of the Secretary also had access to news articles posted online.

The Secretary's statement included the line "[s]ome have sought to justify this vicious behavior as a response to inflammatory material posted on the Internet"—a reference to the video. Nothing from the agents on the ground, or the Deputy Chief of Mission in Libya, mentioned anything about "inflammatory material posted on the Internet." News articles did. The Secretary's statement therefore began a series of public statements by senior administration officials over the next two weeks that conflated the attacks with the inflammatory material—despite a lack of intelligence or eyewitness accounts ever linking the two together.

The morning after the attacks—and just hours after a mortar attack killed Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty—Ben Rhodes, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications, sent an email to relevant press people across the executive branch to schedule a conference call to ensure "we are all in sync on messaging for the rest of the day." The President issued a statement on the deaths of Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty noting the U.S. "rejects efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others"—a reference to the same "inflammatory material posted on the Internet" in the Secretary of State's

statement the night before. Later that morning the President made a televised address from the Rose Garden when he again conflated the events and mentioned the U.S. rejects “all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others. . . . there is absolutely no justification to this type of senseless violence.”

Two days after the attacks, Secretary Clinton made another public reference to the “inflammatory material” in connection with the attacks when she conflated the two by stating there is “no justification, none at all, for responding to this video with violence.”

Three days after the attacks, the White House press secretary conflated what happened in Benghazi with an internet video, refusing to directly address questions by reporters about whether or not the video was directly linked to the attacks.

Five days after the attacks, Susan Rice, a member of the President’s Cabinet, went on five Sunday morning talk shows to discuss the Benghazi attacks. While it is well documented much of what she said pertaining to Benghazi was inaccurate and unsupported by facts, the Committee learned she was the administration’s third choice to appear on the shows—behind the Secretary of State and National Security Advisor. She participated in a call with her staff and two individuals from the White House—Ben Rhodes and David Plouffe, a senior advisor to the President—designed to prepare her for her appearances, and she was given three bullet points of information regarding the Benghazi attacks. Nobody on her preparation call was a subject matter expert, from the intelligence community, or from the Department of Justice or the FBI. They were communications experts.

Despite nobody on her prep call being from the Justice Department or the FBI, Susan Rice made several proclamations about the FBI investigation into the attacks that were unsupported by evidence. She made several statements about the Benghazi attacks that went far beyond the bullet points she had been given, she was unaware the CIA even had a facility in Benghazi—let alone the fact that two Americans had died there—and she was generally ill-prepared to discuss the attacks publicly.

Nine days after the attacks, the President continued to conflate the video with the Benghazi attacks. In an interview with Univision, he responded to a question specifically about Libya saying “What we do know is that the natural protests that arose because of the outrage over the video were used as an excuse by extremists to see if they can also directly harm U.S. interests.”

Despite these public statements by administration officials, from the beginning a different message was being told privately. The night of the attacks the Secretary of State sent an email to a family member acknowledging the attacks were by an “Al Queda-like group,” acknowledging terrorist ties to the attack. The Secretary mentioned nothing about a video in a phone call with the Libyan General National Congress President Mohammad el-Magariaf on the night of the attacks. The day after the attacks the Secretary told the Egyptian Prime Minister “we know that the attack in Libya had nothing to do with the film,” and the Under Secretary for Management

told a group of congressional staff in a private briefing that no protests occurred prior to the attacks.

It was not until September 28, 2012, over two weeks after the attacks, that the administration—using the imprimatur of the intelligence community—issued a statement clarifying its position regarding the Benghazi attacks. New emails show this statement was not done to set the record straight to the American people, however, but rather as a way to protect Susan Rice: the White House wanted to issue a public statement because the news media continued to question her on what she had said on the Sunday shows. The statement said “[a]s we learned more about the attack, we revised our initial assessment to reflect new information indicating that it was a deliberate and organized terrorist attack carried out by extremists.”

A closer look at the actual intelligence, however, reveals a different story. The morning after the attacks the CIA produced a piece—put into the President’s Daily Brief—that included the language “the presence of armed extremists from the outset suggests this was an intentional assault and not the escalation of a peaceful protest.” The following day CIA analysts changed this language and mistakenly included a faulty headline in their widely-disseminated analysis, stating “Extremists Capitalized on *Benghazi* Protests”—with no supporting evidence in the text to support that notion—when they meant to say “Extremists Capitalized on *Cairo* Protests.” The administration seized on this error and repeatedly pointed to the intelligence community’s assessment that protests occurred prior to the Benghazi attacks—despite a lack of evidence and no eyewitness accounts supporting such a narrative. Despite this error, that analysis—nor any other CIA analysis—did not support the notion a video played a direct role in the Benghazi attacks. This did not preclude repeated public statements by administration officials conflating the video with the attacks.

On September 18, 2012, the CIA received analysis of video footage from the State Department facility in Benghazi during the attack. For many, the footage was definitive: no protests occurred. The CIA corrected their analysis to reflect no protests took place. On September 19, 2012, a top intelligence official testified publicly that Benghazi was in fact a terrorist attack, and acknowledged a possible link to al-Qaida.

Despite receiving the video footage on September 18, a top intelligence official testifying publicly on September 19, and the CIA changing its assessment shortly thereafter, the administration did not issue a statement clarifying its position on the attacks until September 28, more than two weeks after the attacks took place.

Even after this statement—suggested by the White House but made under the guise of the intelligence community—the White House continued to use the intelligence community to promote its preferred narrative. The White House asked CIA Acting Director Michael Morell to accompany Susan Rice to a meeting with senators to help explain what she said on the Sunday talk shows; the White House refused to release the video footage of the attacks, despite requests by Michael Morell and the Director of National Intelligence to do so; and the White House released only one set of talking points, drafted by the intelligence community and relied on by Susan Rice for her appearance on the talk shows, instead of an additional second set of talking

points, drafted by Ben Rhodes and relied on by Susan Rice for her appearance on the talk shows. This had the effect of the media and public targeting blame towards the intelligence community for providing Susan Rice with inaccurate information and not the White House—even though the White House talking points mentioned a video and the intelligence community talking points did not.

Disconnect Between Benghazi and Washington

Members of this Committee undertook the task of investigating the events surrounding the Benghazi attacks recognizing the benefit of hindsight. It is possible some of the facts shared with the Committee were not known in their fullness at the time of the attacks. We recognize decisions made the night of the attacks may have been, and should have been, different if the information presented to decision makers in real time reflected a more accurate picture of what was transpiring on the ground in Benghazi. However, it is unfathomable Americans in Benghazi fought their way onto the Benghazi Mission compound and staved off multiple attacks at the Annex while at the same time decision makers half a world away in Washington D.C. thought the attacks were over. It is astounding the men on the ground in Benghazi that night were not going to leave without recovering Ambassador Stevens' body, yet decision makers in Washington D.C. believed that all personnel were going to evacuate Benghazi immediately.

It is impossible to reconcile Washington's belief an evacuation from Benghazi was imminent with the reality on the ground in Benghazi that night. How was this evacuation to take place? From whom would the transportation and security be provided to move from the Annex to the Benghazi airport? Washington was not even aware of the ambush suffered by U.S. personnel on the trip from the Mission compound to the Annex. Washington was not fully aware of the difficulties encountered by the team from Tripoli in negotiating transportation from the Benghazi airport to the Annex. Some decision makers in Washington and elsewhere did not know the U.S. even had a CIA Annex in Benghazi.

From the time of the initial attack on the Mission compound until the evacuation of U.S. personnel from the Annex to the airport, only three U.S. military assets went to Benghazi: two unarmed drones and a contingent of CIA/Defense Department personnel from Tripoli who not only "deployed" on their own volition, but the Secretary of Defense was not even aware of these individuals at the time he was deciding how to respond to the initial attack.

It is one thing to argue nothing could have reached the men fighting for their lives at the Annex before the mortar attacks hit. It is quite another to explain why nothing was even headed toward Benghazi at the time of the mortar attacks. Had the mortars hit at 7:15 a.m. or 9:15 a.m. the result would have been the same because no U.S. military asset—save the two unarmed drones and a Tripoli contingent unknown to the Secretary of Defense—were ever ordered to Benghazi.

A summary of the 7:30 p.m. White House meeting perhaps best captures the immense disconnect between what was happening in Washington D.C. and what was being experienced in Benghazi. The summary of the White House meeting provides:

Overall theme: getting forces ready to deploy in case the crisis expands and a real threat materializes against Embassy Tripoli. DOD will send details to U/S Kennedy (i.e. plane numbers, troop numbers, airfield support needs, etc.) for us to make requests to government of Libya (GOL).

What follows after this summary are 10 action items—half of which deal with the anti-Muslim video the administration knew about well in advance of the Benghazi attacks yet failed to prepare for in any cognizable way.

Analyzing this summary is instructive particularly against the backdrop of what had happened and was happening in Benghazi.

In Benghazi, attackers armed with military weapons attacked a U.S. diplomatic facility. State Department Diplomatic Security agents fought for their lives and GRS personnel from a neighboring U.S. facility fought their way onto the Mission compound to render aid. Meanwhile Washington is talking in terms of "in case the crisis expands and a real threat materializes against Embassy Tripoli." What about the real threat that already existed in Benghazi? The crisis had already expanded from the Mission compound to the Annex, and firefights were occurring intermittently throughout the night. One American was already dead, the Ambassador was missing, and two more Americans would die several hours later in a subsequent attack.

The lack of any sense of urgency in Washington D.C. to assist Americans in harm's way in Benghazi is perhaps best exemplified by the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who normally would have participated in the 7:30 p.m. White House meeting. Upon learning of the attacks in Benghazi, however, instead of remaining at the Pentagon he went to a dinner party and missed the meeting.

Obstructionism

Members of the Committee undertook this task knowing it would not be easy. The Committee was up against an executive branch that had access to the documents and witness testimony needed to complete the work requested by the House of Representatives. Without a compelling reason to produce documents or witnesses, the executive branch had little reason to cooperate with the Committee's investigation. And accordingly the executive branch did not cooperate. The Committee was also up against a Minority that published an "Asked and Answered" compendium before the Committee even held a single hearing or interviewed a single witness. Unfortunately, the minds of our Minority colleagues were made up even before hearing from 80 new witnesses or accessing tens of thousands of new documents—including readouts of the White House meeting, Ambassador Stevens' emails, and SameTime chats from the CIA. The Minority unfortunately insisted on creating a partisan din over the Committee's work even as it became clear new documents and new witnesses were available.

The real injustice was not done to Congress or even a committee of Congress, however. The real injustice wrought by an obsession with politics, preconceived narratives, and

obstructing access to new information and new witnesses was denying the public and the families of those killed and injured an expeditious and full inquiry. The Committee ultimately achieved historic access to both documents and witnesses from the executive branch, and the Minority played no constructive role in obtaining either of these accesses. Such historic access is significant for the legislative branch and enabled this Committee to answer questions posed long ago by the families of those who were killed. Unfortunately this was accomplished despite the Minority and not alongside them, which would have expedited the work and strengthened our institution.

Additionally, the Minority has consistently publicly criticized the pace of the Committee's work. They did so knowing full well they expended no effort to ask the administration to cooperate with the Committee and in fact actively served to obstruct access to both documents and witnesses. It is equally telling the Minority applies a very different standard when it comes to the time the administration takes. Despite repeated promises by senior administration officials shortly after the attacks to bring the perpetrators to justice, it took nearly two years from the time of the attacks until Ahmed Abu Khatallah was arrested. To date, he is the only person arrested in regards to the attacks, and it has been over two years since his arrest. The administration only recently announced it would not pursue the death penalty against Khatallah. His trial date was even more recently set for September of 2017 - five years after the crimes were committed and more than three years after his arrest. Minority members predictably have not uttered a word of complaint about the length of time it has taken for the administration to complete its work.

Conclusion

The four Americans who died in Benghazi —Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty—did so in heroic service to their country. While their memories live on, their deaths were not in vain. This report provides over a dozen recommendations to ensure our government is better positioned to prevent, and respond to, any future attacks like Benghazi, and the State Department's Accountability Review Board also provided a list of recommendations designed to decrease the risk a similar tragedy will ever again occur.

It is my hope this investigation has answered outstanding questions the families of these four individuals may have had. Learning about their bravery the night of the attacks has been a humbling experience. We owe it to them and their families to close this investigation and learn from the new facts the Committee has uncovered. I hope you will join me in calling on our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to continue to remember these four Americans who heroically served our country.

It is also my hope their service and sacrifice may elevate and instruct the tone and substance of our own service to better approximate theirs. After two years of investigation, over 100 witness interviews, and conversations with family and friends of the fallen, I know absolutely nothing about the political ideations of the four killed or those wounded. I know them as fellow Americans who were asked to travel to a dangerous country. I know they were

afforded inadequate security but they served anyway. I know the men from the Annex subordinated their own safety to aid other Americans in harm's way. I know the men from Tripoli were gripped with a sense of urgency and ingenuity reflective of what makes our country unique.

I know there will be a temptation to rely on this or other summaries in lieu of reading the full report. You, Mr. Speaker, will resist that temptation, but I implore others to as well. The full report can be read in less time than our personnel were under assault in Benghazi. The full report can be read in less time than some of our soldiers waited on airlift. Quite candidly the service and sacrifice of these four men, as well as that of others who serve our country in harm's way, deserves a full analysis of the underlying testimony and documents. So, it is my hope our fellow citizens will read the full report, and if questions persist, read the underlying data, and if questions persist, demand answers from those in position to provide them. This Committee uncovered facts not previously known or known incompletely. But the full truth is a big concept to say one has fully conquered.

A country grand enough to produce these four men can handle the full truth of Benghazi. And luckily for us and for them, there is no statute of limitations on the truth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Trey Gowdy', written in a cursive style.

Trey Gowdy
Chairman