

The Truth-O-Meter Says:



**"We were the last flag flying in Benghazi."**

Trey Gowdy on Sunday, May 11th, 2014 in an interview on "Fox News Sunday"

**Trey Gowdy said the United States was 'the last flag flying in Benghazi'**

Rep. Trey Gowdy -- the South Carolina Republican tapped by House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, to head the newly established House Select Committee on Benghazi -- has begun sharing some of the questions he plans to investigate. Gowdy's panel is charged with looking into the Sept. 11, 2012, attack on a U.S. government complex in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

During an [appearance](#) on *Fox News Sunday* on May 11, 2014, host Chris Wallace asked Gowdy, "So, tell me the single biggest question you want to ask" former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Gowdy responded, "Why were we still in Benghazi? The British ambassador was almost assassinated. Our facility was attacked twice. There were multiple episodes of violence. We were the last flag flying in Benghazi, and I would like to know why."

The notion that the United States was "the last flag" in Benghazi has been echoed by other Republican critics of the Obama administration's actions before, during and after the Benghazi attack. Now, with the head of the Benghazi panel citing it as one of his [top investigative priorities](#), we thought we'd check it out.

We quickly found contrary evidence in a [report](#) issued by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on Jan. 15, 2014.

The report stated that "although some countries and international organizations had reduced their presence in Benghazi, the United States maintained a diplomatic presence there similar to the UN, the European Union, and other Western countries such as Italy, France, Turkey, and Malta." The report footnoted this claim to a Dec. 6, 2013, email from the State Department to the Senate committee.

"I think the Senate report is a fine source" for this sort of information, said Thomas Joscelyn, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a group founded by conservatives and hawkish Democrats. "I doubt the Democrats were in cahoots to lie about this sort of thing. Absent any contrary evidence, I don't see any reason to doubt the Senate report on this."

Joscelyn then dug a little further and provided us with some additional evidence.

On Jan. 12, 2013 -- four months after the attack on the U.S. complex -- the vehicle of the Italian consul general [was attacked](#) by terrorists in Benghazi. No one was injured, but according to the State Department, the attack on the Italian diplomat was carried out by terrorists who "had a role in the 2012 attacks against U.S. facilities."

Then, on Oct. 11, 2013, a [car bomb in Benghazi](#) caused severe damage to the building housing the joint honorary consulates of Finland and Sweden. There were no injuries or casualties.

All told, then, it seems that other nations also had a footprint in Benghazi just before the attack on the United States' complex, and continued to have one afterward. So where did the notion that "we were the last flag flying in Benghazi" come from?

When we checked with Gowdy's staff, they pointed us to testimony given by Lt. Col. Andrew Wood, who was stationed in Libya as a site security team commander in Libya from February 2012 to August 2012. He testified before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee when it was investigating the Benghazi attack in October 2012.

Wood's testimony appears to be the source of the vivid phrase "last flag flying in Benghazi." Here's what he told the committee:

*"The British consulate moved out when I was there, and they actually had (a memorandum*



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Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., discussed the new Benghazi committee he'll be heading during an appearance on "Fox News Sunday."

**About this statement:**

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**Sources:**

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- USA Today*, ["Probe targets why U.S. was 'last flag' in Benghazi,"](#) May 13, 2014
- Andrew Wood, [prepared testimony before the House Oversight Committee](#), October 2012
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- Associated Press, ["Car bomb hits Swedish, Finnish consulates in Libya,"](#) Oct. 11, 2013
- Wall Street Journal*, ["Blast Hits Swedish Consulate in Benghazi, Libya,"](#) Oct. 11, 2013
- Interview with [Andrew Wood, former site security team commander in Libya](#), May 15, 2014
- Email interview with Thomas Joscelyn, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, May 15, 2014
- Interview with Andrew Wood, witness at a 2012 hearing of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, May 15, 2014
- Email interview with Amanda Duvall, spokeswoman for Trey Gowdy, May 15, 2014

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*of understanding) with us to leave their weapons and vehicles on our compound there in Benghazi. They would come back and occupy at times, draw their weapons and vehicles, and do their work, and return them and leave. The attack on the International Red Cross was another attack that also involved us and threats to the compound there in Benghazi. The threats were made on Facebook to both the remaining Western influences there in Benghazi, being the Red Cross and the U.S. Embassy compound. The Red Cross was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades in early June. When it was attacked a second time, I believe they made the decision they were going to give up and leave Benghazi. When that occurred, it was apparent to me that we were the last flag flying in Benghazi. We were the last thing on their target list to remove from Benghazi."*

We reached Wood, who is now back at his job with the federal Bureau of Reclamation in Utah. By phone, Wood said that when he used the phrase "last flag flying in Benghazi," he was specifically referring to the three western institutions mentioned in the threats on Facebook -- the British and United States diplomatic complexes and the Red Cross facility.

In other words, Wood didn't literally mean there was no other western presence in Benghazi -- rather, he was referring to the United States as the last of the three specifically cited targets to be attacked.

So by Wood's account, the United States wasn't literally the last western entity in Benghazi -- though it was one of the last, operating a higher-profile and more permanent facility than the other nations that remained on the ground.

For instance, Wood said he recalls Turkey having a presence in Benghazi -- "Amb. Stevens went to meet with Turkish diplomats there," he said -- but he said the Turks tended to put people on the ground periodically and "for a specific reason." France, for its part, would "rent a villa and send their diplomats, then wrap it all up and leave no trace."

Wood said that, in his view, the truth lies "somewhere in the middle" between the Senate report (which glosses over the impermanence of some of the western operations in Benghazi) and Gowdy's claim that the United States was literally the last western entity in the city.

#### **Our ruling**

Gowdy said the United States had "the last flag flying in Benghazi." Some nations, such as the United Kingdom, had abandoned Benghazi or limited their footprint prior to the attack on the United States complex. But like a game of telephone, the meaning of the phrase Gowdy used shifted from its original meaning as politicians embraced it as an evocative talking point.

In his testimony, Wood used the phrase more rhetorically than literally, explaining that the United States was the last of three western institutions that had been mentioned in a terrorist threat to be attacked. In fact, there's clear evidence that several other western nations had a presence in Benghazi immediately before and well after the attack on the U.S. compound. We rate the claim False.

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