

Darrell Issa On Benghazi And The IRS

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HH: Congressman Darrell Issa joins us now. Congressman, great to have you join me, thank you for being there.

DI: Well, thanks for having me on. It's been a while, and I'm glad to be back on talking to your listeners.

HH: A couple of subjects. I'm going to come to the IRS in a second, but I want to start with Benghazi, because the indictment handed down today against one of the terrorists there. Congressman, do you think you know, I'm not sure you can tell us, but do you think you know what was going on, on the ground there? Was the CIA involved in the transfer of weapons to insurgents in Syria?

DI: Well, it's not one of the items that we know, although I've seen it on the internet, too. What we do know is that the ambassador asked for more security, and actually got less security, that there were calls for help that were unheeded by any support from outside, including military personnel that were effectively told to stand down when they tried to be part of a relief mission. And of course, Ambassador Rice outright read off of talking points that had to be knowingly false, claiming that there was a video causing this rather than the reality that it was in fact a preplanned terrorist attack on September 11th. What we also know, of course, is they've unsealed an indictment today that covers people who as far as we know never left Benghazi, have been sitting having espresso at the coffee shops, and like Osama bin Laden, he was indicted before September 11th, but not taken out when there was a chance to take him out. So we have serious doubts about how real this is versus a possible political decision on the eve of CNN making it clear that efforts to take these people out have been minimal or not at all.

HH: It was the CNN report on Jake Tapper's The Lead last week that I'm referring to that there was an alleged transfer, attempted transfer of anti-aircraft missiles and other weaponry to al Qaeda-affiliated elements in Syria, which would of course make this Iran Contra. Is that going to be a focus of inquiry for the committee? Or does that take us into the classified realm that we'll never know what they were covering up?

DI: Well, there's a specific committee chairman, Mike Rogers, who deals with sources and methods and clandestine activities. Our investigation really is about two questions. When you deny an ambassador security he needs, are you just denying it because of gross incompetence, in which case, nobody's been fired? You've got to ask why people aren't being held accountable. Or was this a political aim to make it look like the war on terror was over, that it had been won once Osama bin Laden had been killed? And we need to shift, figure out which one of those two occurred, because whether there were, as you've heard, arms trafficking or not, would have absolutely nothing to do with whether or not you provide the security necessary for a long time loyal ambassador who was a specialist in the Middle East. I visited him in multiple Middle Eastern countries over his tenure. He was asking for more security. He was denied it. And ultimately, that becomes the primary scandal in Benghazi, that we know it was wrong to say no to security, it was wrong not to send an effective rescue mission quickly, and it certainly was wrong to flat lie about the cause of this attack for more than a week in a presidential year.

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HH: Joined by Congressman Darrell Issa, chairman of the House Oversight and Governmental Affairs Committee, where he is doing a wonderful job pursuing, well, the two biggest stories inside the Beltway when it comes to this administration's malfeasance – the cover-up of Benghazi and the gross abuse of the IRS against conservative groups. Congressman, one more area of inquiry on Benghazi, in that amazing testimony by Mr. Hicks, he testified that Secretary of State Clinton called him at 2:00 in the morning, and there was chaos in Tripoli, there had been an attack in Benghazi, the ambassador was missing, they had axes out, they were destroying the computer disc drives. She talked to him, and then ever after news that the ambassador was killed, she never called back. Do you find that extraordinary that she never touched base with her number two again that night?

DI: The lack of direct contact by Hillary Clinton was surprising. You know what's more surprising, though, is that the President disappeared, basically, for the entire period of the attack, and seemed to check out at a time in which we knew at a minimum that the ambassador was missing, and later, of course, that he was killed. It could have been a Tehran-type kidnapping, or it could have been murder. It turned out to be murder. So both the chief executive and the president, and the secretary of State, seemed to be checked out. And of course, the former secretary of Defense also seems to want to take a hands-off particularly as to whether or not they should have called on our friends, allies and NATO forces to be prepared to do something to rescue these people when in

fact, none of that was asked for. And that becomes one of the great questions for men and women listening out there that know that the military tradition is we never leave anyone behind. We will in fact go to rescue our people. But in this case, the rescue was really limited to acting-Ambassador Gregory Hicks renting aircraft, calling on the Libyans to loan him one, and sending his own resources down. And you know, basically the resources, the security resources of an embassy are pretty limited. I certainly think that the former SEALs killed on the roof defending both that facility and the remaining survivors need to be commended and remembered, but you still have to say why weren't there aircraft and capability headed toward them at flank speed? And the next time this happens, can we count on this President and the secretary to actually care about people in harm's way as they're being attacked by al Qaeda elements?

HH: Well, I hope if and when Mr. Hicks returns, or Secretary of State Clinton returns, former Secretary of State, we spend time on the specifics of that conversation with Mr. Hicks, because I find it amazing she did not call him back. Let's turn to the IRS scandal, Mr. Chairman. A week ago, Eliana Johnson, who's this extraordinary reporter at National Review, with whom I'm sure you're familiar with her work...

DI: Yes.

HH: ...put out a story which I think most of the media doesn't quite understand that beigns, "Embattled Internal Revenue Service official, Lois Lerner, and an attorney in the Federal Election Commission's general counsel's office appear to have twice colluded to influence the record before the FEC's vote in the case of a conservative, not-for-profit organization." This means that the IRS scandal isn't just an IRS scandal, Mr. Chairman, if this is true. Are you following this thread?

DI: We are following this thread. Clearly, Lois Lerner is the object of part of our investigation not just because she bobbed the attempt to take the 5th, but because so much points to her and the office of the chief counsel, which of course is a political position. And I think when you look at Lois Lerner, one of the interesting things is she may or may not be officially a political appointee, but she certainly seems to have ideological leanings and a history in her previous job and in this job, and then this nexus to the Federal Election Commission, after the IRS, the most powerful organization when it comes to affecting the future of Americans if they're involved in political activities either directly or indirectly. And as you know, an audit from the FEC to a candidate can be expensive and deadly, and an audit from the IRS to a donor can be equally effective, and can land you in jail if you say one thing wrong while in fact, Lois Lerner is saying nothing at all.

HH: Yeah, the False Statements Act is pretty severe on people who mess with it. What about, Mr. Chairman, the meeting that the IRS chief counsel is said to have had with the President the next day? Do you believe that meeting occurred?

DI: We do believe that that meeting occurred. We always want to drop short of saying that the meeting was with POTUS, the president of the United States, and we always say look, a meeting at the White House is still a meeting that has to be explained as to who, what, where, why and when. And there are copious notes kept of these meetings. But I think one of the questions you have to ask is when the head of the IRS spends over a hundred trips other than the Easter Egg Hunt going to the White House, how political has the IRS become that you have to go to the White House more often than most cabinet officers?

HH: And so given what you know and where you know we're going with this, how much more in the way of hearing can we expect? And by the way, expertly managed hearings on both, I thought. For example, Trey Gowdy and Jim Jordan, very, very well-prepared, and the committee did a good job of sharing out time. But how often are we going to be seeing Benghazi hearings? How often are we going to be seeing IRS hearings? And what's the schedule look like?

DI: Well, in September, we'll be having a hearing specifically related to the review of the so-called ARB, this report that some call a whitewash. But I certainly think it's going to be shown to be insufficient to do the kind of investigation on Benghazi that needs to be done. We're averaging four to five hours of interviews, depositions if you will, transcribed under oath for each 45 minute session that this group had with the witnesses. As we go through, we're finding much more in depth, and much more by documents, the insufficiency of the investigation on Benghazi, and we're going to lay that out. But remember one thing about our committee, and you mentioned some of our superstars. And Jason Chaffetz and Pat Meehan and a number of other great people, former U.S. attorneys and so on, we follow the facts. And so hearings are sometimes to get above the clutter of what you're hearing in spin from the White House, or even from my ranking member, Mr. Cummings. But the most important thing we do is we bring records in, and we bring people in under oath, and we follow the facts. And I think that's where people that talk about a special prosecutor, they've got to count on us to do exactly what a special prosecutor is expected to do. We do it professionally, and we document it.

HH: Well, there's a good argument about that, but with 30 seconds left, Mr. Chairman, do you believe that Ambassador Stevens was overseeing a weapons transfer in Benghazi that night?

DI: I believe he consulted with the Turkish ambassador, and that he was aware of all the activities in Libya, which might have included activities going on. But I don't believe he was personally conducting or involved in it. It wasn't his record.

HH: Thank you so much for your time, Mr. Chairman. Darrell Issa, of course, chairman of the House Oversight and Governmental Affairs Committee, thanks for joining us.

End of interview.