

FUNNY. GENERAL PETRAEUS DIDN'T USE TO AVOID TESTIFYING TO CONGRESS...

ABC follows up on the point I made yesterday—that Congress is now getting interested in David Petraeus' October 31 trip to Egypt and, we now find out, Libya—and reveals that he now doesn't want to testify about his trip.

In late October, Petraeus traveled to Libya to conduct his own review of the Benghazi attack that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

While in Tripoli, he personally questioned the CIA station chief and other CIA personnel who were in Benghazi on Sept. 11 when the attack occurred.

The Libya stop was part of a six nation trip to the region. Petraeus intended the review as a way to prepare for his upcoming testimony before Congress on Benghazi.

[snip]

But now Petraeus is telling friends he does not think he should testify.

Petraeus has offered two reasons for wanting to avoid testifying: Acting CIA Director Morell is in possession of all the information Petraeus gathered in conducting his review and he has more current information gathered since Petraeus' departure; and it would be a media circus.

So David Petraeus, after charging taxpayers for the cost to take his own plane to the Middle

East to prepare for this testimony, doesn't want to deliver it himself, preferring instead to let Acting Director Mike Morell tell secondhand about what Petraeus learned on that very expensive fact-finding trip?

Note, ABC doesn't question CIA's claim that they can't hand over the trip report to the intelligence committees because it's not done yet, in spite of Dianne Feinstein's complaints yesterday about someone else having already read a copy of it.

Which leads me to believe Petraeus wants to prevent or delay Congress from getting this information in the first place.

To get an idea of what Petraeus might want to withhold from Congress, let's take a look at the CIA timeline (using David Ignatius' apparent transcription of it), which was based on a briefing while Petraeus was still overseas. The timing means it's unclear whether this incorporated some of what Petraeus learned while there, or whether the CIA released this timeline before Petraeus got back, effectively deliberately giving the press outdated information. Moreover, it's possible Petraeus had others deliver the timeline so his own credibility wouldn't be impacted if it turned out to be false.

Of all the timeline bullet points, Petraeus' personal interviews with the station chief and other CIA personnel would have resolved one of the key details that remains contested: why CIA waited 24 minutes before heading to the Mission to rescue Chris Stevens.

10:04 p.m.: A six-person rescue squad from the agency's Global Response Staff (GRS) leaves in two vehicles. The team leader is a career CIA officer; the team includes a contractor named Tyrone Woods, who later died. During the previous 24-minute interval, the CIA base chief calls the February 17 Brigade, other militias and the Libyan

intelligence service seeking vehicles with .50-caliber machine guns. Nobody responds. The team leader and the base chief agree at 10:04 that they can't wait any longer, and the squad heads for the consulate.

The **senior intelligence official said that he doesn't know whether Woods or any of the other team members agitated to go sooner** but added that he wouldn't be surprised. "I want them to have a sense of urgency," he said. [my emphasis]

Note, the CIA timeline here doesn't really answer one key allegation made by Fox, that the Global Response Staff were told to wait before going to rescue the Mission employees. And it conveniently blames the Libyan militia—the one party to the rescue who will likely not have representatives in the closed testimony this week—for the delay.

Now consider what the WSJ reported in its much more balanced version of the CIA timeline: After the attack, CIA claimed State had misunderstood CIA's obligation to protect the Mission.

Congressional investigators say it appears that the CIA and State Department weren't on the same page about their respective roles on security, underlining the rift between agencies over taking responsibility and raising questions about whether the security arrangement in Benghazi was flawed.

[snip]

Protecting the CIA annex was a roughly 10-man security force. The State Department thought it had a formal agreement with the CIA that called for that force to be used in emergencies to bolster security for the consulate.

The State Department has been criticized by lawmakers and others for failing to provide adequate security for its ambassador, especially in light of an attack there in June and after other violence prompted the U.K. to pull out of the city. In October, Mrs. Clinton took responsibility for any security lapses.

Among U.S. diplomatic officials in Libya, the nearby CIA force and the secret agreement allayed concerns about security levels.

"They were the cavalry," a senior U.S. official said of the CIA team, adding that CIA's backup security was an important factor in State's decision to maintain a consulate there.

There's also the intriguing detail that Hillary called Petraeus to make sure they were on the same page.

At one point during the consulate siege, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton telephoned the CIA director directly to seek assistance.

[snip]

At 5:41 p.m. Eastern time, Mrs. Clinton called Mr. Petraeus. She wanted to make sure the two agencies were on the same page.

The timing of this would place it at 11:41 Benghazi time, just as the CIA team was leaving the Mission without Chris Stevens. But it is interesting that Hillary made that call.

There are other details where the State timeline and CIA timeline conflict, notably as to the identity of the people who ran into the burning safe haven to look for Stevens' body, with both agencies claiming their own people made heroic attempts to find Stevens.

It looks like Petraeus would have answers to a lot of key questions, but he'd rather Morell give them.

And remember, at the same time as CIA orchestrated this oddly-timed briefing, Scott Shane was writing a valedictory to Petraeus' untarnished image. As with the briefing, I'm wondering how much of that story relied on information Petraeus learned while on his very expensive fact-finding trip.