

BENGHAZI TALKING POINTS: PETRAEUS' REVENGE

It has taken three days for the bleating press corps in DC to wade through the roll-out of Benghazi talking point emails and realize that the tension behind the emails – as has been clear from just days after the attack – is that Benghazi was really a CIA, not a State, Mission, and therefore CIA bears responsibility for many of the security lapses. So State, in making changes to the emails, was making sure it didn't get all the blame for CIA's failures.

David Corn describes it this way.

The revisions—which deleted several lines noting that the CIA months before the attack had produced intelligence reports on the threat of Al Qaeda-linked extremists in Benghazi—appear to have been driven by State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland, who, it should be noted, is a career Foggy Bottomer who has served Republican and Democratic administrations [ed: including Dick Cheney], not a political appointee. Her motive seems obvious: fend off a CIA CYA move that could make the State Department look lousy.

Yet it's only now, several days into this frenzy, that some reporters are coming to report this.

And they're still not noting ways in which the CIA's initial emails were self-serving. For example, when the CIA said,

Since April, there have been at least five other attacks against foreign interests in Benghazi by unidentified assailants, including the June attack against the British Ambassador's convoy.

We cannot rule out the individuals has [sic] previously surveilled the U.S. facilities, also contributing to the efficacy of the attacks.

They might have also said, “since February, people tied to CIA’s mission have twice been harassed by militia members, suggesting our OpSec was so bad they knew we were in Benghazi.”

And when CIA’s talking points said,

The crowd almost certainly was a mix of individuals from across many sectors of Libyan society. That being said, we do know that extremists with ties to al-Qa’ida participated in the attack.

They might also have said that the “trusted” militia, February 17 Brigade, trained by David Petraeus’ CIA, whose career legacy is based on false claims of successfully training locals, appears to have allowed the attack to happen (and, critically, delayed CIA guards from heading to the State mission to help).

Note that Congressman Frank Wolf is just now showing some interest in why CIA’s vetting of the militia central to the mission’s defense was so bad. Maybe if CIA had included that detail in their self-serving initial talking points, Congress would have turned to this issue more quickly, particularly since we’re currently training more potentially suspect militias in Syria.

In other words, the story CIA – which had fucked up in big ways – wanted to tell was that it had warned State and State had done nothing in response (which, perhaps unsurprisingly, is precisely the story Darrell Issa and Jason Chaffetz are trying to tell). The truthful story would have been (in part) that CIA had botched the militia scene in Benghazi, and that had gotten the Ambassador killed.

Yet that appears to be just the half of the

self-serving function this email release has had for CIA.

Consider how this rolled out. While ABC got the credit for the scoop, Cheney propagandist Stephen Hayes first published some of the emails (which ABC notes). Then Hayes did a follow-up story that was downright literary, a tribute to its maligned hero, David Petraeus.

CIA director David Petraeus was surprised when he read the freshly rewritten talking points an aide had emailed him in the early afternoon of Saturday, September 15. One day earlier, analysts with the CIA's Office of Terrorism Analysis had drafted a set of unclassified talking points policymakers could use to discuss the attacks in Benghazi, Libya. But this new version—produced with input from senior Obama administration policymakers—was a shadow of the original.

Hayes' new story is one depicting Petraeus' disappointment when his (self-serving and deceptive) preferred narrative did not survive review by the Department whose Ambassador Petraeus' Agency had gotten killed. It emphasizes the enemy the CIA would like to highlight — Ansar al-Sharia — and not Petraeus' militia whose inaction had been at least as important to the success of the attack. It claims (this entire campaign being evidence to the contrary) that Petraeus resigned himself to the messaging decisions the Administration made.

Finally, importantly, it at least appears to rely explicitly on the personal account of Petraeus himself.

This candid, real-time assessment from then-CIA director Petraeus offers a glimpse of what many intelligence officials were saying privately as top Obama officials set aside the truth about Benghazi and spun a fanciful tale

about a movie that never mattered and a demonstration that never happened.

David Petraeus, who tried and failed to get his preferred spin of the attack in Benghazi accepted by the Obama Administration, who subsequently got fired, purportedly for fucking and possibly sharing classified information with his mistress, went to Dick Cheney's propagandist to try to get his preferred spin adopted after the fact.

That's what this Benghazi campaign has become.

One more detail. Hayes suggests he got this (and therefore, presumably, so did ABC) from a leaked version of a report the GOP did based in part on the emails GOP Senators on the Senate Intelligence Committee got in exchange for letting John Brennan's nomination to replace David Petraeus at CIA move out of committee.

The exchange of emails is laid out in a 43-page report from the chairmen of five committees in the House of Representatives.

[snip]

The White House provided the emails to members of the House and Senate intelligence committees for a limited time and with the stipulation that the documents were available for review only and would not be turned over to the committees. The White House and committee leadership agreed to that arrangement as part of a deal that would keep Republican senators from blocking the confirmation of John Brennan, the president's choice to run the CIA.

Just as an aside, remember that the Administration preferred to turn over these emails – which predictably got leaked contrary to the agreement Senators made – rather than turning over OLC memos that SSCI ought to have

in any case.

And now John Boehner is demanding the White House agree to release these emails publicly.

So Senate Intelligence Committee, to GOP report, to Cheney's propagandist, and after a subpoena threat, public release.

Let me ask you: aside from the fact that Benghazi is a good fundraising vehicle, why did the GOP want these? More importantly, how do you think Saxby Chambliss and his friends knew to demand these emails?

It's almost as if a little birdie – the guy who was fired, making way for John Brennan to take over – told Republicans in Congress the emails were there.

There are many more ironies and underlying issues, which I hope to cover in Part Two. But for the moment, note how neatly this all serves to let David Petraeus tell the story he tried to tell just before he got fired.