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BENGAZI TALKING POINTS AND MICHAEL J. MORELL'S ROLE IN SHAPING THE ADMINISTRATION'S NARRATIVE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

HEARING CONTENTS:

OPENING STATEMENTS:

Mike Rogers [\[view PDF\]](#)

Chairman, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger [\[view PDF\]](#)

Ranking Member, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

WITNESS:

Michael Morell [\[view PDF\]](#)

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April 2, 2014

Subject: Full Committee Hearing on Benghazi
Investigation with Michael Morell

Chairman Rogers Opening Statement as Prepared for
Delivery

Today, we continue the Committee's investigation into the September 11, 2012, attacks against U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya, with testimony from CIA's former Deputy Director Michael Morell. This Committee has heard from Mr. Morell on the attacks several times before, but in closed session. Today, we receive his testimony in open session, so the American people can hear directly from one of the most-senior intelligence officials involved in the lead up and the response to those attacks.

We are all interested in Mr. Morell's role in developing the talking points that shaped the Administration's inaccurate narrative about the attacks. We expect he will explain for the public how this controversy developed.

I want to first acknowledge the courageous American heroes on the ground in Benghazi, both those who lost their lives— Ambassador Chris Stevens, Information Officer Sean Smith, and security officers Greg Doherty and Tyrone Woods—and those who risked their lives to save their colleagues. Each of these brave Americans served on the front lines defending America’s interests so the rest of us can sleep safely. We lost some of the best among us on that terrible night.

Many of the brave officers who came to the rescue have testified in closed session before the Committee. These men took extraordinary measures to save their fellow Americans. Without their courage and skill, the terrorists would have killed other Americans in Benghazi that night. Most of these silent warriors prefer to stay unnamed and many still defend America in some of the most dangerous locations around the world.

I thank Mr. Morell for volunteering to testify once again. A terrorist attack against U.S. facilities is a serious event, and this Committee has been conducting a thorough and detailed investigation over the last 19 months to understand what happened. We have held over 17 Member

events, reviewed thousands of documents, and interviewed the men on the ground that night.

I want to focus on how this Committee received inaccurate talking points, and how the Administration used those talking points to perpetuate a false narrative about the attacks.

After the attacks, this Committee immediately sought the truth. We received a closed briefing with NCTC Director Olsen and then-CIA Director Petraeus on September 12th and 13th respectively. After Director Petraeus' briefing, some members of this Committee sought guidance about what could be said publicly in an unclassified form. We knew that our constituents – the American people – needed to know the truth about the attacks.

Unfortunately, the talking points did not reflect the best information available. They did not mention that al-Qa'ida-linked terrorists were involved in the attacks, though briefings and intelligence reports assessed they were involved. The talking points suggested there had been a demonstration, when there had been none and the officers on the ground said so. The talking points were so devoid of

facts or useful information that I dismissed them; I didn't use them. In fact, on September 12, 2012, I said that the attack had "all the hallmarks of al Qai'da." I don't believe any members of this Committee used the talking points after the attacks. As Director Petraeus described, they were useless.

You indicated that you did not know Susan Rice would appear on the Sunday talk shows on September 16th. Your statement implies that you would have written different talking points if you knew she would use them that day.

But Susan Rice used them. As the spokesperson for the United States government, she used them to tell the American people that there had been a protest spawned by an anti-Islamic video. She made no mention of al-Qai'da. She focused on the protest. You told the Deputies Committee on September 15 – the day before she appeared in public – that the Chief of Station reported that there was no protest.

The public needs to hear exactly how those talking points were created. The American people should understand your role.

I must conclude that the White House used your talking points to perpetuate its own misguided political agenda. I believe that the White House wanted America to believe al-Qa'ida to be on the run, and thus they needed the attacks to be in response to an anti-Islamic video. And so the White House used your talking points to say so.

But we knew that al-Qa'ida and other affiliated terrorist organizations and militia groups participated in the attacks. Officers on the ground knew that there was no protest. If the American people had known what those officers knew, if the Administration had told them the truth, the public would know that these terrorists were to blame. The public would better understand the threat we are facing. And our intelligence and defense professionals could have been mobilized with greater speed to find and take these terrorists off the battlefield.

I don't believe the Administration learned the lesson of this failure. Ambassador Rice stated on February 23rd of this year that she has no regrets; she still believes the talking points represented the "the best information that we had at the time." But she is wrong. The White House wants to ignore reality and perpetuate the fallacy that al-

Qa'ida and other Islamic extremists are on the verge of defeat.

Here is why this this issue is important. Al-Qa'ida is growing and planning operations against Americans from their safe havens in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. Yet the Administration continues to talk and act as if al-Qa'ida is on the run. They foolishly focus on the al-Qa'ida "core." But it makes no difference whether terrorists who target Americans are directed by al-Qa'ida in Pakistan or al-Qai'da in Yemen.

Let's also not forget that the State Department ignored ample warnings about the deteriorating threat environment in Libya and rejected requests for additional security support from officers on the ground in Benghazi. And the Defense Department failed to posture itself to protect U.S. facilities that were in harm's way leading up to the 9/11 anniversary.

Benghazi highlights our failures and signals our future. We know the location of some Benghazi attackers, and we have the capability to get them. But this Administration has neither the will nor the courage to take action. They

refuse to act on what we know is true: al-Qa'ida is a greater threat today than it was on September 10, 2001.

Our nation must redouble its efforts against this threat. We must continue to confront the terrorist threat with every tool we have, and with a clear mind about what is at stake. It has been 19 months since four Americans were killed by terrorists and we still have not brought any to justice. This is a disgrace. In the 9 months I have remaining as Chairman, I will continue demanding that the Administration take decisive action against the Benghazi terrorists.

**Ranking Member Opening Statement
Open Hearing with Michael Morell
April 2, 2014**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I first want to take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership of our Committee. Your commitment to bi-partisanship and your dedication to finding solutions to the country's most pressing national security problems have transformed this Committee into a shining example of what good can come when we work together.

We have a wide diversity of opinions on this Committee. We disagree, we argue, but we always focus on the endgame and how to get there together. And each of us respects and gets along with the other.

Your leadership and the spirit of bi-partisanship you fostered has resulted in a Committee with an unparalleled track record of accomplishment—passing intelligence authorization acts every year, passing cyber security legislation, and proposing bi-partisan FISA reform that ends bulk collection of metadata, increases privacy and civil liberties, and preserves an important capability.

The Committee will miss you and your leadership. But, we still have you until the end of this Congress, and we know that you will continue to roll up your sleeves to do the work the American people have come to expect of this bi-partisan Committee.

Today, as we turn our attention to the tragic events in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, we know that there were many heroes and many people who suffered great loss that day.

We mourn the deaths of Ambassador Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, and we honor the other men and women who acted courageously that day to save the lives of others. No one left a comrade behind.

We owe it to them and to the countless others who risk their lives to defend America to find out what went wrong to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Which is what we're doing. The independent Accountability Review Board headed by Admiral Mike Mullen and Ambassador Thomas Pickering completed a comprehensive review of the situation and issued 29 recommendations. The Government is implementing those recommendations, especially when it comes to increasing security.

We in Congress have also combed through every aspect of this tragedy.

We have run down every allegation and every theory, no matter how far-fetched. On this Committee alone we have reviewed thousands of classified documents, watched frame after frame of security video, and interviewed the key intelligence individuals on the ground.

We have also found areas that can—and must—be improved to prevent future tragedies.

But, to date we have found absolutely no inappropriate motivations.

Specific to today's hearing, we have also found no conspiracies in the editing of the Talking Points—only never-ending conspiracy theories.

I was the one who asked for the Talking Points in the days immediately following the tragedy. I asked for them to aid our ability on this Committee to communicate with the American people without revealing classified information.

Through exhaustive review, we have only found evidence that the Talking Points were edited to ensure accuracy, to check classification, and to safeguard the investigation and eventual prosecution—which has to be our ultimate goal: finding and holding accountable those who committed this terrible act.

And this is the third time we have had Mr. Morell before this Committee to talk about Benghazi.

In my dealings with him, Mr. Morell has been frank, honest and forthcoming, and I expect he will be so again today.

So, after today, I hope we can get back to our more pressing work on the Committee: overseeing the intelligence community, passing Intelligence Authorization Acts, improving cybersecurity, and reforming FISA.

In the meantime, let me say thank you, Mr. Morell, for being so willing to come before the Committee, even after you have retired. Your service to this country for over 30 years has been exemplary, and we all owe you, and the people in the CIA you led-- especially those deployed in hotspots around the world-- a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Question

Mr. Morell, there are some who try to accuse you of overriding the assessment of U.S. personnel “on the ground,” saying you would need “overwhelming and conclusive evidence” to do so since the Chief of Station’s assessment “in most every case” is considered “gospel.”

For those of us who know what a Chief of Station does, this accusation sounds uninformed. Chiefs of Station are senior field intelligence collectors, not analysts, particularly because intelligence comes from many sources? Chief of Station assessments are taken very seriously, of course, but their word is not taken as gospel, isn’t that right?

And for those of us who know our geography, we also know that the Chiefs of Station are based in capitols, and Benghazi is not the capitol of Libya. In fact, Tripoli is 632 miles away from Benghazi. That is like saying someone in Chicago or Montreal knows the ground truth for an event in Washington, D.C.

Furthermore, the personnel from Tripoli did not arrive until hours after the initial attacks.

Finally, the Chief of Station in Tripoli that night said to us that the way you handled his email was perfectly appropriate. You received his initial assessment on September 15, and immediately you asked him to elaborate and provide more details, correct?

Written Statement for the Record
Michael Morell
Former Acting Director and Deputy Director of the CIA
House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
2 April 2014

Introduction

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Ruppertsberger, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you very much for inviting me to testify today on Benghazi. As an officer of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for 33 years, I always valued the ability to communicate directly with Congress in general and with this Committee in particular.

I am especially grateful for this opportunity because I am deeply troubled by allegations – made by several members of Congress as well as by certain media outlets – that I inappropriately altered and influenced CIA’s classified analysis and its unclassified talking points about what happened in Benghazi, Libya in September 2012 and that I covered up those actions. These allegations accuse me of taking these actions for the political benefit of President Obama and then Secretary of State Clinton. These allegations are false.

I am very appreciative that the Committee decided to conduct this hearing in open session. As the Committee is aware, I have testified three previous times on Benghazi in classified sessions – twice before this Committee and once before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI). Today, I appreciate the opportunity to speak directly to the American people about the facts on what really happened.

Before I get into the details, I want to emphasize to the Committee – and to the American people – something that we must remember above all else: on the night of 11 September 2012 and in the early morning hours of 12 September, terrorists in Benghazi killed four American patriots – Ambassador Chris Stevens, communications officer Sean Smith, and two security officers, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty. My prayers are with

them, and my heart goes out to their families. We owe Chris, Sean, Tyrone, and Glen the best efforts of our entire government to bring the perpetrators of the attacks to justice and to take whatever steps we can to minimize the chances of something like this happening again.

I have divided this statement into three sections – a section outlining the evolution of the Agency’s analysis on the attacks in Benghazi, a section outlining exactly what did – and what did not – transpire with regard to the unclassified talking points requested by this Committee, and a final section that looks at each of the specific allegations that have been made against me.

Before beginning, let me emphasize again: there is no truth to the allegations that the CIA or I “cooked the books” with regard to what happened in Benghazi and then tried to cover this up after the fact. Indeed, the facts show that the CIA and I faithfully performed our duties in accordance with the highest standards of objectivity and nonpartisanship. And, any allegation or insinuation to the contrary is just plain wrong.

Mr. Chairman, in laying out the facts, I do not want to come across as being defensive regarding either the analysis or the talking points. Both had their flaws. I recognize that the Agency and I could have done a better job on some aspects of our work on Benghazi. But none of the flaws in our work, in any way, reflect any intention to mislead Congress or the American people or any intention to provide political benefit to anyone.

The Analysis

As a veteran of the CIA’s Directorate of Analysis – the analytic arm of the Agency – I know that, as a general rule, analysts prefer to wait to get better information before they tell policymakers what they think. However, in situations like the one that unfolded in Benghazi in September 2012, analysts are not able to wait. They are expected to provide analysis in a timely manner – meaning they are expected to make a judgment in the moment based on the totality of information they have at that time. As the analysts do this, one of their primary responsibilities is to keep an open mind that their judgments may well change as more intelligence is collected and made available to them, to make this clear to the recipients of the analysis, and to actually adjust their analysis as circumstances warrant.

In the case of Benghazi, this is exactly what occurred. No where could this be clearer than in the unclassified talking points themselves, which said: “This assessment may change as additional information is collected and analyzed and currently available information continues to be evaluated.”

The analysts’ first thorough, fully coordinated, assessment of what happened in Benghazi was written on 12 September, less than 24 hours after the attacks, and disseminated to senior level policymakers and to the Congressional intelligence committees on 13 September. It was coordinated with analysts across the Intelligence Community. This means that the assessment represented the views of the Intelligence Community, not just CIA. It was approved for publication by a senior officer in CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence and by a senior officer in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The piece made four key points:

- That the attack on the State Department facility in Benghazi was a spontaneous event that evolved from a protest in Benghazi. The title of the 13 September piece was: “Extremists Capitalized on Benghazi Protests.” The key sentence read: “We assess the attacks on Tuesday against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi began spontaneously”
- That the attackers were inspired by the breach of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo on 11 September. The first sentence of the piece said “...the attacks began spontaneously following the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo....” There was no mention of the video defaming the Prophet Muhammad as a motivation for the attacks in Benghazi. In fact, there was no mention of the video at all.
- That al-Qa’ida linked individuals and other extremists were involved in the attacks. The piece said “Extremists with ties to al-Qa’ida were involved in the attacks....” And by “extremists” the analysts say that they meant terrorists. They did not use the word terrorist, but that is exactly what they meant. This should be obvious from the use of the words “extremist” and “al-Qa’ida” in the same sentence. The critically important point is that the analysts considered this a terrorist attack from the very beginning. They were not slow coming to this judgment.

- That the attacks did not involve significant pre-planning. The piece, in the first sentence, implied that the attackers decided to act after seeing events in Cairo several hours earlier but on the same day. It also noted: “Attacks of increasing intensity occurred in waves throughout the night, as extremists took advantage of opportunities to attack U.S. facilities.” The analysts explicitly made the judgment about the lack of significant pre-planning in a piece published on 24 September.

The judgment that the attack evolved spontaneously following the breach at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo was also in the classified talking points that the analysts prepared for Director Petraeus’ briefing to the SSCI on 13 September and to this Committee on 14 September. Those talking points said:

- “We assess the attacks on Tuesday in Benghazi began spontaneously following the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and evolved into a direct assault against the Consulate.”
- “Extremists with ties to al-Qa’ida participated in the attacks.”

I was not at either of those sessions, so I don’t know to what extent Director Petraeus used those points. I raise the Director’s talking points here only to make the point that the analysts were being consistent in what they were writing about the issue.

I had no personal role in the production of the intelligence analysis that was distributed on 13 September or in the talking points prepared for the Director’s testimonies on 13 and 14 September. The Director and Deputy Director of CIA are only rarely involved in the daily production of intelligence analysis. Multiple CIA Directors over a long period of time have delegated this function to the leadership of CIA’s analytic directorate. And, during the attacks in Benghazi, I was not even in Washington.

I was in Amman, Jordan, in the middle of an official trip to the Middle East, when I learned that about the tragic death of the Ambassador and of three other Americans. I phoned Director Petraeus on the morning of 12 September and recommended to him that I curtail my trip and come home immediately. He concurred. Before leaving for the airport to return to Washington, I participated in one National Security Council Deputies

Committee Meeting (as I was a member of this group) via Secure Video Teleconference. I was in listening mode since I was on the road. There was no discussion of talking points; at this juncture no talking points had been requested. And I did not say anything about a protest occurring prior to the attack. I left Amman on the evening of 12 September, and I landed at Andrews Air Force Base at 1:00 am on 13 September. That morning, I read the 13 September piece “Extremists Capitalized on Benghazi Protests” in my office. I had no interactions with the analysts before the piece was published. I did not influence the analysis in any way.

Let me make clear that we know that the analysts had an evidentiary basis to make the judgment that there was a protest ongoing at the time of the attack. All together, there were roughly a dozen or so reports indicating that this was the case. Some of this information arrived at CIA Headquarters (HQS) on 12 September and some arrived on 13 September. These included press accounts -- including public statements by the Libyan Government and by extremists. And they included intelligence reports from CIA, the National Security Agency, and the Department of Defense – including a report from CIA’s Station in Tripoli that arrived at CIA HQS on 13 September.

Let me provide some examples from the open source reporting:

- The first Libyan Government statement about the incident said that a demonstration preceded the attack. In a press conference on 12 September, the Deputy Interior Minister for eastern Libya stated that the State Department facility was stormed after guards opened fire on a crowd gathered outside.
- An Ansar al-Sharia extremist uploaded a video to YouTube on 12 September praising the attack as a spontaneous, popular uprising.

It is important to note that, when the analysts wrote their assessment on 12 September, there was not a single piece of information in their possession denying there was a protest. The available evidence was expressly to the contrary. Indeed, for the analysts to have disregarded the reports indicating there was a protest would have required ignoring all of the information they had at that time. On what basis could the analysts possibly have done so? None that was apparent at the time.

The first indication that there may not have been a protest arrived on 14 September in the form of an intelligence report from Tripoli Station offering the account by one of the officers from the CIA Base in Benghazi who had responded to the State Department facility's call for help. This report was disseminated broadly in the intelligence and policy communities. This officer said that there was no sign of a large gathering or protest when he arrived at the State Department facility. I do not remember seeing this report – it was not sent to me directly nor was it in my morning reading package.

Nevertheless, the analysts' reaction to the report was that, by itself, it was not enough to alter their judgment about a protest because the author of the report did not reach the State Department facility until well after the attack began – almost an hour. The analysts judged that the protest could have dissipated once the State Department facility was assaulted. (I will cover Chief of Station Tripoli's views on the issue of whether or not there was a protest later in this statement).

CIA published another analysis on Benghazi on the morning of 15 September. This was written jointly with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and again coordinated within the Intelligence Community. It reinforced two judgments from the piece on 13 September – that extremists with ties to al-Qa'ida participated in the attack and that the attacks were inspired by that day's breach of our Embassy in Cairo. The piece also added a new possible motivation – al-Qa'ida leader Ayman Zawahiri's public statement late on 10 September calling on the Libyan people to avenge the death in Pakistan of senior al-Qa'ida leader Abu Yahya al-Libi, a Libyan national. Again, the piece made no reference to the video defaming the Prophet Muhammad as a motivation for the attack in Benghazi.

It was not until 18 September, when CIA received the Libyan Government's assessment of video footage from the State Department facility's security cameras that showed the front of the facility just before the attack – with no sign of protesters – that it became clear that we needed to revisit our analysis. It is important to note that on 18 September, the Libyans did not provide the video; they only provided their assessment of the video.

Analysts refined their analysis, and on 22 September, CIA – in coordination with the Intelligence Community – published a joint piece with NCTC that

assessed that the attacks were a deliberate assault by extremists influenced by events in Cairo, not that they grew spontaneously out of local protests. The piece said:

- “Our assessment of the circumstances surrounding last week’s attack against U.S facilities in Benghazi and the motivations for the operation have gradually evolved from what we first conveyed...”
- “In contrast to last week’s assessment that the attacks grew spontaneously out of local protests inspired by developments that day in Cairo, we now assess that they were a deliberate assault by extremists.”
- “Our most credible information indicates that there was not a protest ongoing at the time of the attack as first reported.”
- “The timing of the attacks still appears to have been influenced by the events in Cairo. It is also possible that some of the participants were galvanized by Ayman al-Zawahiri’s call the previous day for Libyan’s to avenge the death in Pakistan of one of their countrymen, senior al-Qa’ida leader Abu Yayha al-Libi.”
- “...the lethality and efficacy of the operation are not necessarily indications of extensive planning. We judge the attackers could have quickly organized the operation based on the skill and experience acquired during the uprising against the Qadhafi regime and from extremist training.”
- “We continue to assess the perpetrators of the attack included a mix of individuals with ties to multiple extremist groups. Reporting indicates that many of the attackers were drawn from the Libyan militia group Ansar al-Sharia—which has some members with ties to al-Qa’ida affiliates—and one or more groups associated with it.”

Let me make five points about the analysis. And, let me make clear that these are my personal views, although I know they are shared by many senior officers in the Intelligence Community.

- One, the analysts who worked on this issue are some of CIA's best and brightest. I am immensely proud of the work they do every day. And, in the aftermath of the attacks in Benghazi, they were doing the very best they could in a chaotic and demanding environment.
- Two, the analysts' initial assessment regarding the particular issue of the presence of a protest was shown by subsequent information to have been incorrect. But, in my view, given the information the analysts had at the time, there was no other conclusion they could have come to other than that there was protest ongoing before the attacks. The analysts made this judgment because of the information that they had available to them when it was published –not because of any political pressure or interference. Indeed, there is not a shred of evidence to support the latter allegation.
- Three, the shifts we saw in this analysis over time reflect what we often see in a crisis situation when we are dealing with limited information. As the information continues to flow, analysts change their assessments, just as they trained to do and just as the American people would expect them to do. That is exactly what happened here.
- Four, having said all this, what the analysts wrote on 13 September was poorly articulated and did not accurately reflect their analytic thinking. What they wrote created the impression that the protesters became the attackers. That is not what the analysts ever thought. They believed the attackers opportunistically took advantage of the protest to stage the attack. You can actually see this in the title of the piece on 13 September –“Extremists Capitalized on Benghazi Protests.”
- Five, while the initial judgment about the protest changed as more information became available, the other three key judgments in the analysis published on 13 September have held up. To this day, the analysts still believe that extremists with ties to al-Qa'ida participated in the attacks – that these were terrorist attacks -- that the attacks were conducted with little preplanning, and that they were motivated by the success of attackers in Cairo and/or by Zawahiri's call for revenge of the death of Abu Yayha al-Libi.

The Talking Points

Let me now turn to the unclassified talking points. In this part of my statement, I will explain the genesis of the unclassified talking points, how they were produced, and who made what changes to them and why. Before I do, I would like to note up front that CIA did not and does not regularly produce unclassified talking points for officials in any branch of our government.

When Director Petraeus briefed this Committee on the morning of 14 September, the Committee asked for unclassified talking points that members might use that coming weekend should the media ask them about the attacks. Director Petraeus agreed to the request. I learned about the request a number of hours later in the early evening hours of 14 September. At no time in the process of developing the talking points was I aware that Susan Rice was going to be on the Sunday talk shows.

The then Director of CIA's Office of Terrorism Analysis (D/OTA) – one of the most talented analysts with whom I have worked – was with Director Petraeus for the briefing of this Committee on 14 September, heard the Committee's request and the Director's affirmative response, returned to CIA HQS, and personally produced a first draft of the talking points. She coordinated these points with her analysts, officers from the operational side of the agency, and attorneys from the Office of General Counsel (given that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had already opened a criminal investigation into the deaths of four Americans). Once completed, D/OTA sent the talking points to our Office of Congressional Affairs.

The points then went through an additional editing and coordination process inside CIA. Officers from our Office of Congressional Affairs and our Office of Public Affairs edited the talking points. While it made sense for these officers to be involved – the talking points had been requested by Congress for public use – these officers did not involve the substantive experts in their discussion, as they should have done.

These officers then coordinated the talking points outside CIA, again without the presence of a CIA substantive expert. They sent the talking points to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the FBI, the State Department (which had lost officers in the attack), and the National Security Staff (NSS), which needed to be aware of points to be made by

members of Congress about a serious national security issue. At this point, I had not yet seen the talking points, nor was I even aware of their existence. I will describe my personal role with regards to the talking points below.

On the morning of 15 September, the Deputies Committee met, and the talking points were briefly discussed. Later that morning, I edited the talking points, and then I asked that both our analysts and our operations officers to look at them one more time. I then circulated the revised points to my colleagues on the Deputies Committee – at the NSS, ODNI, FBI, the Department of Justice (DOJ), State, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and NSA. Finally, Director Petraeus reviewed the points. Although he thought the points were not robust and although he was unhappy about a particular deletion (which we will cover later in this statement), he approved the talking points, and they were delivered to both Congressional intelligence committees.

I would now like to address the changes to the talking points in detail. By my count, there were 20 changes made to the talking points – between the first set drafted by D/OTA on 14 September and the version that was sent to this Committee on 15 September. Some were purely stylistic and others more substantive. Of the 20 changes, there are a half dozen that have subsequently raised questions. I want to go through those in detail.

First, during D/OTA's own coordination process with the substantive experts on 14 September, an operations officer in our Counterterrorism Center asked his colleagues: "The second tick says we know extremists with ties to AQ participated in the attack, which implies complicity in the deaths of the American officers. Do we know this?" The analysts responded: "Good point that it could be interpreted this way – perhaps better stated that we know they participated in the protests. We do not know who was responsible for the deaths." D/OTA concurred with this change. I did not see the original D/OTA draft that had the previous formulation, and I did not make this change, as some have alleged.

Still on 14 September, the group of CIA public affairs and congressional affairs officers deleted the phrase "with ties to al-Qa'ida." The officers who made this change say that they were focused on several considerations in doing so, namely ensuring that the talking points contained no information that could compromise sources and methods, that nothing was said that could compromise the FBI investigation by prematurely attributing

responsibility for the attacks to any one person or group, and finally, that the information pointing to any particular group was limited. I did not remove this phrase, as some have alleged. And these officers were just making a judgment about risk. They were in no way responding to political pressure.

Third, these same CIA public affairs and congressional affairs officers changed the word “attacks” to “demonstrations” in the first sentence of the D/OTA draft that originally read: “The attacks in Benghazi were spontaneously inspired by the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and evolved into a direct assault against the U.S. Consulate...” Participants in the editing session do not have a clear recollection as to why they made this change, but some have said that they believed the sentence to be illogical as written. Saying that “attacks” evolved into an “assault” did not make sense, because attacks and assault are synonymous. In my view, the most important point here is that the concept of an attack/assault still existed in the first sentence even after this change. Again, contrary to some allegations, I did not make this change.

Fourth, the FBI requested – and CIA public affairs and congressional affairs officers agreed – that we change the phrase “We do know Islamic extremists participated in the violent demonstrations” to “There are indications that Islamic extremists participated in the violent demonstrations.” In making this request, the FBI said that it did not want to be definitive about the perpetrators, as its investigation was just beginning.

Fifth, the State Department requested – and CIA public affairs and congressional affairs officers agreed – to delete an entire sentence. That sentence noted that initial press reporting had linked Ansar al-Sharia – an extremist militia group in Eastern Libya – to the attack but that the group denied its members were involved. The State Department said that it was premature to single out only one group, and CIA agreed because the only unclassified evidence that existed for the group’s involvement was an Ansar al-Sharia public claim of responsibility, which the group had retracted.

Finally, in discussing the changes made to the talking points, I should note the addition of language (that I later learned was made at the request of Director Petraeus) that said two things – that the Agency had produced numerous pieces on the growing security threat in Benghazi and eastern Libya and that the Agency had warned the Embassy in Cairo in advance of the violent assault there – and the subsequent removal of that language by

me for reasons I will describe below. The State Department also advocated the removal of this language. Unlike the other changes, I was in fact personally and directly involved in this change.

Let me make a key point here: Even before I learned of State's concern about the warning language, I had already made the decision to delete this language when it came to me for review. I will explain this more fully later in this testimony.

I now want to discuss in specific detail my personal role in the talking points. Up through the late afternoon of 14 September, as I have noted, I had not played any role in the talking points. Indeed, I was not even aware that the talking points had been requested, had been drafted, or had already gone through a several rounds of internal and external coordination. No one told me, which is not surprising given my schedule that afternoon – a White House meeting with the National Security Advisor, two follow-on meetings at CIA HQS regarding the meeting at the White House, a meeting on an urgent operational matter, and a meeting with an important foreign liaison partner.

I was first made aware of the existence of the talking points when I was given the latest version of them in the late afternoon/early evening of 14 September. Between two important meetings in the Director's conference room, sometime around 5:00 pm – as one group of officers were leaving and another arriving – the Director's Chief of Staff showed me the then current version of the talking points. He explained the origin of the points. He told me that he was concerned that I was not aware of the talking points and that I needed to be brought into the process. The draft he showed to me contained the warning language added at the request of the Director, and it incorporated all of the changes I detailed above.

I skimmed the talking points quickly. I immediately reacted to the warning language, telling the Chief of Staff that outlining the warnings we had provided seemed to me to be inappropriate. I told him that I thought the warnings needed to be removed. While the warning language was factually accurate, my strong reaction to including this language in the talking points was based on two issues.

First, and most importantly, I saw the language as self-serving and defensive on the Agency's part. Here was a tragic event, and we were saying “we told

you so.” This was wrong, in my view, and would have been seen as an attempt to make the CIA look good and to shift any possible blame for failing to see the risk of an attack from the Agency to the State Department. The language created the image that the CIA had done its job by providing warning to other parts of the government, implying that if other parts of the government had been responsive the attacks may not have occurred and lives may not have been lost. In short, I saw it as unfair to say we provided warnings to the State Department, without giving State the opportunity to say what they did in response to those warnings. I knew there would be plenty of time down the road to have that discussion, and I believed strongly that we should not start this discussion in the public domain. Anyone who knows me would know that I would be sensitive to the Agency making self-serving statements.

- I shared this decision and my logic behind it with Senators Feinstein and Chambliss on 13 November, with Speaker Boehner on 14 November, and with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of this Committee also on 14 November. I did so in discussions about Benghazi during a round of courtesy calls in the immediate aftermath of Director Petraeus’ resignation from government.

Second, I had just been told that the request was to give members of this Committee language they could use to describe what happened in Benghazi on 11-12 September. What the CIA did in the months, weeks, and days leading up to the attack seemed to me simply not relevant to the specific request made to the Director; a rendition of the warnings was not needed for a factual description of the chain of events that unfolded on 11-12 September. In addition, I saw the CIA warning cable to Cairo as irrelevant to this specific request for talking points.

What I didn’t know at the time was that the warning language had been inserted at the suggestion of Director Petraeus. The Director’s Chief of Staff did not tell me that. Had I known it, I would have discussed it directly with the Director that evening.

I made no changes to the talking points on the evening of 14 September, and I told my staff I would look at the talking points after they had been fully coordinated in the inter-agency process that had already begun well before I got involved with the talking points.

Early the next morning – Saturday, 15 September -- I learned from my Executive Assistant that the State Department had expressed concerns over the warning language and that the talking points were in limbo as a result. My Executive Assistant went on to say that, as a result of State's concern, Denis McDonough, then the Deputy National Security Advisor, wanted to talk about the talking points at a Deputies Meeting scheduled for that morning. I mentioned this to Director Petraeus and to his Chief of Staff as we were preparing to host Family Day at the Agency, telling them of the State Department's concern and telling them that I agreed with the Department. I do not remember the Director's specific response, but he did not argue for keeping the warning language in the talking points.

The Deputies Committee meeting – which I attended by secure video teleconference from CIA HQS and which began at 8:00 am – was not focused on Benghazi or even Libya. At that point, we were having one and usually two Deputies Committee meetings a day to assess the security situation across the entire Middle East, Africa, and South Asia and to make any decisions that were deemed necessary to enhance the security of Americans in those locations.

There was not a lengthy discussion about the talking points at the Deputies Committee meeting that morning. What I said during that meeting, and I believe this is close to verbatim, is that I was aware that there were some concerns in the inter-agency over the talking points, that I shared some of those concerns, that I would work on the talking points, and that I would circulate a new draft to Deputies for final coordination.

Following this meeting, I edited the talking points for the first time. When I edited the talking points, I was unaware of any of the previous drafts, including any changes that already had been incorporated. I had only the most recent version. I was unaware for example, that “al-Qa’ida” had once been in the talking points and removed from them. Let me also emphasize again that when I edited the talking points I did not know that Susan Rice was going to draw from the talking points or even that she was going on the Sunday shows. Finally, let me note that I did not discuss the talking points with anyone before I edited them – including anyone in the White House and anyone in the State Department. According to the log of my phone calls, I had only two phone calls that morning – a conversation with the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States and a conversation with John Brennan at the White House. The latter phone call was with regard to an operational

counterterrorism matter. John and I did not discuss the talking points. These are all important points, and speculation and insinuation to the contrary is simply not true.

Let me explain the changes I made. I removed the warning language –both the general warning that CIA had been providing about the deteriorating security situation in eastern Libya and Benghazi and also the reference to the specific warning that CIA provided to the Embassy in Cairo, for the reasons that I explained earlier. This accounted for the vast majority of the words I removed.

I also removed the word “Islamic” in the sentence “There are indications that Islamic extremists participated in the attacks.” I did so because I did not think it wise to say something publicly – in particular a religious reference – that might add even more volatility to an already agitated situation in the Middle East and North Africa. This was a judgment I made about risk. I did not change anything in the first sentence about demonstrations evolving into an attack because I saw it as fully consistent with our classified analysis at the time.

Once edited, I personally sent the points to a number of individuals who had participated in the Deputies Committee Meeting. Only minor changes were suggested; no substantive changes were suggested or made. I also asked my Executive Assistant to share a copy of the final points with both the analytic and operational sides of the CIA to ensure they were comfortable with the draft. I was particularly interested in making sure that the D/OTA was okay with them. From a substantive perspective – in terms of the analytic judgments – she was, although having heard this Committee’s discussion the previous day, she said she was concerned that the points did not go far enough for the Committee. The final step in the process was me sending the talking points to our then head of Congressional Affairs.

The purpose of my email to the head of Congressional Affairs was to send him the final draft, ask him to run it by the Director, and then send it to the Committee. You probably have seen that I wrote in that email that “I spoke to the Director earlier about State’s deep concern about mentioning the warnings and the other work done on this, but you will want to reemphasize in your note to DCIA.” In response, the Director noted that he thought the points were quite weak, adding “No mention of the cable to Cairo, either?” I will not speak for the Director other than to say that he did approve the

points. He had the authority to ask for a redraft. He noted in his email that this was the National Security Staff's call, but that was not accurate. It was the CIA's call to produce points that captured the CIA's best analytic judgment at the time.

Some final thoughts on the talking points:

- The final version of talking points was not an example of CIA's best work. The talking points could have been better. They could have been more robust and more refined. I take responsibility for that.
- It was not appropriate for my officers in the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Congressional Affairs to themselves edit the talking points without a substantive expert in the room, and it was not appropriate for them to coordinate the talking points with the interagency without the involvement of a substantive expert.
- I have questions about whether CIA – or any entity in the Intelligence Community – should be writing talking points for public use by either the Executive branch or by Congress. CIA has deep experience in talking to government policymakers. CIA has little experience in talking to the American people. If policymakers want to speak to the public, they should write their own talking points and CIA should coordinate on those for the purposes of accuracy and protecting sources and methods.
- But, having said all that, the judgment in the talking points that the attacks evolved from demonstrations in Benghazi was fully consistent with what the Intelligence Community had written in its classified publications just two days before, based on the best information it had at that time.

Specific Allegations

I want to conclude this statement by reviewing in detail the specific allegations that have been levied against me. Indeed, I feel I must respond directly to these allegations – because they are speculation and insinuation without any basis in fact and because some of them are a basic attack on my character.

The first allegation is that I knew that there had not been a protest when I edited the talking points on 15 September. This allegation flows from an email sent by our Chief of Station (COS) in Tripoli to my staff – and to a number of other officials at CIA -- on the morning of 15 September. The email was the latest in a series of daily reports updating the security situation in Libya (these had been requested by HQS and other COSs were doing the same). Near the end of the email was a reference to the COS's assessment that the Benghazi attack was “not/not an escalation of protests.” I read the email as part of my morning reading on 15 September.

The COS' view on the issue of the protest jumped out at me immediately. Why? Because it contradicted what the analysts believed at that time and what they had written just two days before for senior policymakers. Because of this, I asked my Executive Assistant to request that the COS provide supporting information and logic for his view that there was no protest. My Executive Assistant sent this request at roughly 10:40 am on 15 September.

The COS' view was significant to me for two reasons. First, I took the views of any COS seriously because Chiefs of Station are the Agency's senior officers on the ground. They are closest to the action. And, secondly, I had a lot of confidence in COS Tripoli. I had worked closely with him when he worked at headquarters prior to his field assignment, and I found him to be an outstanding intelligence officer in every respect.

In his initial email, the COS provided two data points as to why he thought there was no protest, but neither seemed convincing to me. His first point was that local press reports said there was no protest (this was not compelling because there were other press reports saying that there was a protest). His second point was that the CIA security officers who responded to the call for help from the State Department facility from the separate CIA base on the night of the attacks did not see a protest when they arrived (again, this was not compelling because these officers did not arrive until almost an hour after the attack started and the protesters could have dispersed by them). Also, in my mind at the time, was the fact that Tripoli Station – just the day before – disseminated an intelligence report indicating that there was a protest. In any case, I felt the analysts needed more from the COS if they were going to refine their judgment regarding a protest.

I want to be clear that I read the email from the COS before I edited the talking points. To guide my editing, I used what the analysts assessed at the

time – that the attack in Benghazi evolved spontaneously from a protest. The revised talking points were signed off on by D/OTA as being an accurate depiction of what her analysts thought at that time. Operations officers at CIA headquarters – those officers in Washington who work most closely with a COS – also signed off on the revised talking points.

It is important here to understand and underscore – and this is going to seem counterintuitive to some and contrary to some media commentary – that CIA chiefs of station do not/not make analytic calls for the Agency. The job of a COS is to collect information, not to do the analysis. Their points of view are taken very seriously by both by senior CIA officers and by CIA analysts, but the analytic side of the Agency, which has access to all the relevant information, makes the official CIA call on any analytic issue. This is the way it was for the entire 33 years of my career, and it would have been inappropriate of me to impose the COS’s view on the analysts. I should also note that if Chiefs of Station feel strongly about an issue, they can provide – and are indeed encouraged to provide – their own views to policymakers via a special reporting channel.

The COS responded to my request quickly, and early on the morning of Sunday, 16 September, he sent to my office and to others in CIA a detailed note explaining his reasoning on the protest issue. I again read it as part of my morning reading. I did three things:

- I asked my Executive Assistant to task the Directorate of Intelligence (DI), the analytic arm of the Agency, for its thoughts on the COS’s view and to have a response to me no later than 5:00 pm on the same day. I told my assistant “I want to know what the DI thinks now.”
- I forwarded the COS’ note to Director Petraeus, with the following comment from me: “Sir – The bottom line is that I don’t know what to make of this. We need to have the analysts look at this and see if there is anything here that changes their view. I have asked them to do so. Michael.” The Director responded to my note, saying “Look forward to what the analysts have to say.”
- And, I told my colleagues in the 15 September Deputies Committee meeting about the assessment from the COS regarding the issue of a protest. But let me be clear: I also reminded them that the COS’ view was different from that of the analysts and that we would be working

the issue and would get back to them. I did not remember this when I testified in front of this Committee a year ago. But, in preparing for this hearing, I reviewed the notes taken by my Executive Assistant at the Deputies Committee meeting and I saw that I did share this information with the Deputies.

On the afternoon of 16 September, the analysts responded to my tasking for their thoughts with a memo to both Director Petraeus and me. The memo, which I read on the evening of 16 September began by saying the “assessment that there were no peaceful protests on the day of the attack is in contrast to other reports that peaceful protests preceded the violent attack.” The analysts stuck with their 13 September assessment, although they did note at the end of the memo that they were open to refining their judgment if new information became available.

My actions with regard to the COS email were appropriate and fully consistent with my responsibilities as Deputy Director. I wanted to get the analysis right and to make sure that the appropriate people knew about the discrepancy between the analysts and the COS. I spotted the inconsistency between the COS’ and the analysts’ view; I asked for more information from the COS; I asked the analysts to think about whether they should change their judgment based on the comments of the COS, I asked them to do it quickly, and I gave the policymakers a heads-up on the issue. These are hardly the actions of one who would have been seeking to bury or ignore the COS’s assessment.

Some people have subsequently asked me “why didn’t you call Susan Rice and at least let her know that there was a disagreement between the COS and the analysts?” Here is the answer: As I noted earlier, I did not know Ambassador Rice was going to use our talking points on the Sunday shows; in fact, I did not even know she was going to be on the shows. My understanding was that the talking points were for this Committee only.

Some have alleged that COS Tripoli told me “within hours” of the attack that there was no protest. The COS email to my office saying there was no protest arrived roughly 3 days and 18 hours after the attack on the State Department facility.

The second allegation I want to address is that I deliberately lied to Senators Graham, McCain, and Ayotte in a meeting with them regarding Benghazi in

late November 2012. The issue is over whether or not I was aware of the truth when I told them that the FBI had removed the reference to al-Qa'ida in the talking points when in fact the CIA had done so. I strongly regret that left the Senators with the impression that I deliberately misled them. I did not – nor did I intend to – do so.

Here are the facts. One of the three Senators asked me “Who removed al-Qa'ida from the talking points?” I made an error and said “the FBI.” I made this error because I had not personally removed the language and because I was thinking about the change the FBI did make to the talking points – the one I mentioned earlier about the FBI not wanting to be too definitive about Islamic extremists having conducted the attack because the Bureau's investigation was just beginning – and I simply got the two changes mixed up. There was no deliberate attempt to mislead.

What was important was correcting the mistake. On the ride from Capitol Hill to CIA HQS, my Director of Congressional Affairs – who was with me in the meeting with the Senators – told me that he thought I had made a mistake. I responded immediately “Let's figure that out, and if I did make a mistake, let's correct the record.” This work was completed very quickly, and my Director of Congressional Affairs informed Congressional Staff just a few hours after I made the error, much shorter than the 24 hours that some have alleged. Some have also said that I only corrected the record after the FBI called me to complain about my error. No one from the FBI ever called me to express displeasure.

To be clear: I did make a mistake by saying that the FBI made the change. But, I also did not lie to three United States Senators. In fact, I corrected the record as soon as possible. If my goal had been to obfuscate and leave the misimpression that the change wasn't made by the CIA but by some other agency, why would I have immediately corrected the misstatement?

The third allegation I would like to address is one made in the “Additional Views” Section of the recent SSCI report on Benghazi. This section – which outlines the views of a six members of the Committee – accuses me of deliberately misleading the Committee when I said in a classified hearing that the talking points were provided to the NSS for awareness and not for coordination. These Senators also noted that I made no effort to correct the record after the hearing, thus proving that I was trying to perpetuate a myth

that the White House played no part in the drafting or editing of the talking points.

There are two points I must stress. First, I could have and should have provided a more detailed answer to the Committee's question. My response downplaying the NSS's role reflected both the truth of the very limited changes made by the NSS but even more my desire to emphasize that the substantive judgments were being made by the CIA and other relevant Intelligence Community agencies, not by policy agencies. In short, what I meant to convey in response to the Committee's query was that there was no way that CIA would have accepted any substantive changes requested by anyone at the White House or anywhere else unless our analysts fully agreed with that change. Allowing the White House to make such changes would be inconsistent with our responsibilities. And, I did not correct the record because I did not know there was an issue with my answer until I read the "Additional Views" section of the SSCI report when it was released publicly in January of this year.

Second, the "Additional Views" section implies that the White House, and more specifically the NSS, had a hand in the substantive judgments in the talking points. The "Additional Views" section asserts that my failure to correct the record perpetuated the myth that the White House did not draft the talking points. The section, by making this claim, was implying that the White did indeed write the talking points and edit them.

However, as anyone can see from looking at the various versions of the talking points, the NSS did not write the talking points and the NSS suggested very few changes to the talking points – and all of them editorial in nature. No one at the NSS suggested or requested a single substantive change. That is a simple fact, and calling it a myth doesn't change the reality. For example, one change suggested by the NSS was to change the reference in the talking points to the U.S. Consulate to a more precise term for the facility because it was not technically a consulate. Another requested change was a simple reordering of a couple of sentences for the sake of clarity. Editorial? Yes. Substantive? No.

Finally, I want to address a question – not an allegation -- raised in the "Additional Views" section of the SSCI report. The question relates to Senator Burr asking all the witnesses at a SSCI hearing if I knew who changed "attacks" to "demonstrations" in the first sentence of the talking

points and that I said “no.” The issue being raised by the “Additional Views” section is not whether I lied – no one has said that – but whether, in answering the question, I should have been more forthcoming with the Committee about my own role in editing the talking points.

Let me share two thoughts. First, I have reviewed the transcript of the testimony of that hearing, and Senator Burr actually asked about two changes – do you know who changed “attacks” to “demonstrations” and do you know who removed “al-Qa’ida” from the talking points? I did answer the questions that were asked and, as I did not know at the time who had made those particular changes, I said “no.” But I do agree that I should have gone on to say “But Senator you should know that I myself made a number of other changes to the talking points -- that you did not inquire about -- when they came to me for review.” I talked to Senator Burr about this very issue before I left the Agency, and I told him the same thing. I told him I could have done a better job answering the question.

Lessons Learned

Both the SSCI and this Committee are aware that, given the initial analysis regarding whether or not there was a protest and given that the final draft of the talking points could have been better, that when I was Acting Director, I ordered a review of the analysis and a review of the talking points – what actually happened, what was done well, what was not done so well, and how can the CIA could improve. I tasked the Directorate of Intelligence to do the first review, and I tasked a senior attorney in our Office of General Counsel to do the review on the talking points. I asked the latter to look closely at my own role in the process and if there was fault to be found to say so. He knew that I meant it.

Both of these reports were made available to this Committee and to SSCI – but one was not provided in a timely manner. The review of the analysis was provided to SSCI and to this Committee on 4 January 2013. The review on the talking points was held up over the issue of whether or not the emails regarding the talking points were protected by executive privilege. I wanted to move forward with sending them to the Committees, but I was not permitted to do so. I was not able to send the review on the talking points until after the White House released to Congress and to the media those emails regarding the talking points.

Some final thoughts – and these too are about lessons learned. This time, lessons learned for me. Besides not making factual mistakes or not being as precise as I should have been in conversations with U.S. Senators, there are three things that I wish I would have done differently.

- On Saturday, 15 September, when I edited the talking points for the first time, I wish I had gotten the analysts around my conference table to have gone over the points with me in detail. If I had done so, I believe the talking points would have turned out to be more responsive to the Committee’s request. But, let me make clear: Even if had I gotten the analysts around my conference table, the judgment that the attacks evolved spontaneously from protests would have still been in the points – because that is precisely what the analysts believed at the time.
- After the resolution of the executive privilege issue over the emails, I wish I would have pushed harder for us to finish our internal review on the process that produced the talking points. We moved slowly on this, and we did not get you the report until early August. We should have moved faster.
- Throughout my many conversations on Benghazi, I wish had taken every opportunity to drive home two of the most important points: One, analytic work done in a crisis often evolves and judgments become clearer as more information is obtained. That is what happened here. And, two politics played absolutely no role in the analytic work of the Agency or in any of my actions.

Mr. Chairman, I have tried to be as forthright as possible in this statement for record. I hope that this puts to rest the questions that have been raised. Perhaps some will think that I have been too forthright in pushing back on the specific allegations made against me. But, if that is true, then this statement is itself a great example of speaking truth to power.