

Clinton Testifies Before House Benghazi Committee

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Former secretary of state Hillary Clinton testified for more than eight hours Thursday before the House Select Committee ostensibly established to investigate the attack on US facilities in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012, in which four Americans were killed, including the US ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens.

As has been the case for the seven other congressional investigations into Benghazi, Republicans sought to use the incident to torpedo the Clinton presidential campaign, while Democrats sought to defend Clinton and expose the partisan motivation of her critics. More importantly, however, both parties covered up the dirty operations of the CIA and Pentagon in Libya, in alliance with Al Qaeda-linked groups, which produced the Benghazi debacle.

Only one brief exchange between Republican Congressman Mike Pompeo and Clinton touched on the relationship between the US government and Al Qaeda forces in eastern Libya which is at the heart of the Benghazi affair.

Pompeo displayed a blown-up photograph of Ambassador Stevens meeting with a top leader of an Islamist militia in Benghazi on September 9, 2012, two days before the attack which elements of that militia carried out on the US diplomatic facility. He also cited a cable sent by Stevens to the State Department recording the meeting, whose subject was the deteriorating security situation in Benghazi.

The same meeting was reported by the *New York Times* in a lengthy front-page article in December 2013, but identifying the American participant only as “a US official.” The *Times* account described the unnamed militia leaders as hostile to the American and warning him to leave Benghazi as soon as possible, but added, “They also gushed about their gratitude for President Obama’s support in their uprising against Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi.”

In other words, Stevens was meeting with leaders of the CIA-backed revolt against Gaddafi who were now turning against their American sponsors. According to numerous reports in the European press—largely suppressed by the corporate-controlled media in the United States—the CIA had organized a massive shipment of arms, equipment and manpower from the port of Benghazi in eastern Libya, through Turkey and into Syria.

That is why the CIA facility in Benghazi was large and well-defended—two US contract gunmen were killed by mortar fire, but the building was never in danger of being overrun—while the State Department facility was occupied only intermittently, not classified as a consulate, and lightly defended.

There were apparently conflicts between the US military-intelligence apparatus and its

Islamist allies over what weapons would be made available—US agencies were trying to block the transfer of surface-to-air missiles from the vast stockpiles captured from the Gaddafi regime in Libya—as well as tensions over the price to be paid, and which groups in Syria would receive the weapons.

Much of this remains murky, three years later. But what is indisputable is that the CIA and Pentagon were in alliance with Al Qaeda elements in both Libya and Syria, using them in the successful regime-change operation in Libya that concluded with the torture and murder of Muammar Gaddafi, and in the similar operation in Syria that, while failing to overthrow Bashar al-Assad, has turned the country into a devastated wasteland, with half the population displaced from their homes.

Pompeo pursued his line of questioning on contacts with Al Qaeda briefly, noting that, on the day he was killed, Ambassador Stevens sent a cable about his meeting with Wissam Bin Hamid, described previously by the US government as someone who “fought in Iraq under the flag of al-Qaeda.”

“Were you aware that our folks were either wittingly or unwittingly meeting with al-Qaeda on the ground in Benghazi, Libya, just hours before the attack?” the Republican congressman asked Clinton.

“I know nothing about this, Congressman,” she responded.

Under further questioning, she denied any knowledge of US operations to arm Islamist rebels in both Libya and Syria.

Asked if she had considered using private contractors to supply such arms, Clinton replied, “No, not seriously.”

Pompeo then produced an email from Clinton to her top adviser, Jake Sullivan, in which she proposed using just such contractors to funnel arms into Libya. Asked to respond, she said that she hadn’t “seriously” made the proposal.

On other matters, Clinton was well-prepared for the hearing, and easily turned aside most of the blatantly political insinuations from her Republican questioners, while basking in the praise and support of the Democratic minority on the committee. But she was visibly surprised by the photograph of Stevens meeting with an Al Qaeda leader in Benghazi, claimed to know nothing of it, or of the cable Stevens sent to the State Department about it. Pompeo then quickly moved on to other subjects.

As a political event, the hearing was a debacle for the Republicans. The credibility of the committee, never very great, was completely shattered this month by a series of statements by Republican congressmen and a Republican committee staffer.

First, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, seeking to defend himself against criticism by a right-wing faction of Republicans charging the leadership had done too little to fight the Democrats, cited the work of the Benghazi committee. He told Sean Hannity of Fox News, on Tuesday, October 6, that the Clinton investigation was part of a “strategy to fight and win.” He added: “Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right? But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a select committee. What are her numbers today? Her numbers are dropping.”

Then a senior Republican staff member, Brad Podliska, went public with allegations that he was fired because he resisted efforts to “hyper-focus on Hillary Clinton.” He revealed that following the leak to the *New York Times* in March that revealed Clinton’s use of a private server for her email as secretary of state, the Republican majority had shifted its attention entirely to that issue.

A second Republican congressman said October 21 that the Benghazi committee was aimed at Clinton. Speaking on a morning radio program in upstate New York, Representative Richard Hanna said, “This may not be politically correct, but I think that there was a big part of this investigation that was designed to go after people and an individual, Hillary Clinton.”

These revelations did so much damage to the committee’s standing that on Sunday the committee chairman, Trey Gowdy of South Carolina, told a nationally televised interview program that his Republican colleagues should “Shut up talking about things you don’t know anything about.”

Gowdy did not help his claim that the Benghazi committee was non-political, however, with his own performance at Thursday’s hearing. He devoted his entire first ten-minute round of questions for Clinton to her relationship with Sidney Blumenthal, a long-time Clinton aide and adviser who held no position in the State Department and had never been to Libya, but who passed on observations about the country from his business partner, former CIA operative Tyler Drumheller.

The Benghazi committee has operated for 17 months, taking longer than similar committees that investigated Watergate, Iran-Contra, the 9/11 attacks, and other national-security disasters or political scandals. Gowdy announced in the course of Thursday’s hearing that the committee was still to hear from 20 additional witnesses, suggesting that it will continue operations well into the 2016 presidential campaign.

Meanwhile the real scandal embedded in the Benghazi events—the connections between the US military-intelligence apparatus and Al Qaeda and similar Islamist forces, including ISIS—continues to be the subject of a near-total cover-up by both the Democratic and Republican parties and the corporate-controlled media.

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