

US Congressional report on Benghazi leaves roots of attack in the dark

Bill Van Auken**29 June 2016**

Having spent more time and money than earlier Congressional probes into the Kennedy assassination, the Watergate scandal and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Republican-controlled House Select Committee on Benghazi wound up its operations with a whimper Tuesday, releasing a report that found no new culpability in the September 11, 2012 attacks that claimed the lives of US Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

The select committee's report is the product of the ninth investigation into the events in Benghazi—including seven previous congressional probes and one by the US State Department. Eight hundred pages long and involving interviews with 107 witnesses as well as the examination of 75,000 pages of documents, the report sheds little fresh light on the bloody events of nearly four years ago.

While criticizing the Obama administration, the State Department, Pentagon and CIA for failing to predict the violence, adequately secure the US facilities in Benghazi or respond rapidly once they came under attack, the report continues the prevailing silence of the US government, both major parties and the corporate media on the real roots of the debacle in Benghazi. These lie in “blowback” from Washington waging wars for regime change in the region, utilizing as its proxies Al Qaeda-linked militias armed and backed by the CIA.

From the outset, the formation of the select committee and its operations have constituted a partisan affair driven in the first instance by Republican attempts to exploit the Benghazi killings as a means of undermining the presidential candidacy of Democrat Hillary Clinton, who was secretary of state at the time of the attacks. This was openly acknowledged last September by Representative Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, who boasted that “we put

together a Benghazi special committee” and, as a result, Clinton’s poll “numbers are dropping.”

While the probe inadvertently uncovered Clinton’s use of a private email server for her official communications, a matter that is under separate investigation by the FBI, it produced no evidence of specific wrongdoing in relation to the Benghazi affair.

In their own report, issued a day earlier, Democrats on the select committee accused the Republican leadership of “grave abuses,” including the exclusion of Democratic members from interviews, leaking false information and using “exploiting the deaths of four Americans” for political fundraising.

The harshest criticism in the Republican-drafted report was directed against the Pentagon. It questioned “why the world’s most powerful military was not positioned to respond,” adding, “What was disturbing from the evidence that the Committee found was that at the time of the final lethal attack, no asset ordered by the Secretary [of Defense] had even left the ground.”

Even this condemnation was considerably blunted, however, by the panel’s own acknowledgement that there were no US military units capable of reaching Benghazi in time to have prevented any of the deaths.

Among the new information included in the report is the revelation that Stevens, the US ambassador, was in Benghazi at the time of the attack at least in part to prepare the turning of a diplomatic office there into a official US consulate as part of the preparation for a planned visit to Libya the following month by the secretary of state.

Clinton, who played a leading role in promoting the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya and celebrated the lynch mob murder of the country’s leader Muammar Gaddafi with the infamous statement, “We came, we saw, he died,” apparently planned to use

the trip as something of a victory lap in preparation for her planned run for the presidency. After the deaths of the four Americans, the plan was quickly and quietly shelved.

Also of interest was the revelation that the Americans who survived the attacks, most of them agents and contractors of the US CIA, were able to escape to the Benghazi airport thanks to the arrival of “50 heavily-armed security vehicles” belonging to “Libyan Military Intelligence.”

“Libyan Military Intelligence,” the report continues, “were not part of the Libyan government, nor affiliated with any of the militias the CIA or State Department had developed a relationship with during the prior 18 months since the Libyan revolution took place. Instead, Libya Military Intelligence—whom the CIA did not even know existed until the night of the attacks—were comprised of former military officers under the Qadhafi regime who had gone into hiding in fear of being assassinated... In other words, some of the very individuals the United States had helped remove from power during the Libyan revolution were the only Libyans that came to the assistance of the United States on the night of the Benghazi attacks.”

The report, however, includes no attempt to probe more deeply into this extraordinary situation in which US officials were attacked and murdered by their Libyan allies, a collection of Islamist militias linked to Al Qaeda, and rescued by those Washington had waged a war to overthrow.

Clinton’s principal culpability in the Benghazi massacre lies not in issues of security of the US facilities, response to the attack or distortion of what transpired, but rather in her promotion of wars of aggression to topple regimes in both Libya and Syria, using “human rights” as a pretext for furthering US geo-strategic interests in the Middle East.

To further this strategy, the US directly backed Islamist militias in Libya led by former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, an Al Qaeda affiliate, providing them with arms and funding and assuring their advance through a relentless bombing campaign. Christopher Stevens, who became the US ambassador, was at the center of this operation from April 2011 on.

Nowhere in the select committee’s report is there an examination of why the CIA had established the so-called Benghazi annex staffed with dozens of agents

and contractors. The reality is that, in the aftermath of Gaddafi’s overthrow, the focus of the agency’s operation turned to Syria. The annex was employed to organize—in conjunction with the Turkish government—the transfer of both massive amounts of weapons from the Libyan government’s stockpile along with Islamist fighters into Syria to carry out a far bloodier war than one waged in Libya.

The fiasco in Benghazi was evidently the result of a falling out between the US officials on the ground and the Al Qaeda-linked militias they had backed against Gaddafi and with which they were collaborating in fomenting the war in Syria. Whether it was over ideology, money or a combination of the two is still unclear.

While the Benghazi affair has been the subject of the most bitter recriminations between the Democrats and Republicans, neither party has any interest in investigating the real crimes from which it arose, imperialist crimes that have cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Libyans and Syrians and turned millions into refugees.



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