

Benghazi Review Panel Member: Fox-Promoted GOP Claims Against Clinton Are "Total Bullshit"

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A member of the independent panel that reviewed the September attack on a U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya is calling attempts by Fox News and congressional Republicans to blame Hillary Clinton for the deaths of U.S. personnel "total bullshit."

Fox News has been promoting Republican attacks blaming Hillary Clinton for security cutbacks prior to the September 2012 attack on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, Libya. But Richard Shinnick, a member of the five-person State Department Accountability Review Board that [reviewed](#) the Benghazi attacks last fall, says such claims are unfounded.

"Hillary Clinton was never in the loop for that," said Shinnick, a former 27-year foreign services officer. "It just doesn't make any sense to anybody who understands the State Department. They all know that the Secretary of State was never in that chain of responding to Benghazi, it just wasn't so."

On April 25, the Republican chairmen of five House committees released a report that stated Clinton's congressional testimony that she was unaware of requests for additional security at the Benghazi compound was false, citing a cable signed by Clinton that responded to one such request by calling for security cuts. Fox News, which has frequently harped on the Benghazi attack to criticize the Obama administration, [quickly promoted](#) the GOP attacks, [calling them](#) a "Benghazi Bombshell."

The Republican [report](#) specifically criticized the Accountability Review Board for failing

to criticize Clinton:

The Board's finding regarding the security decisions in Benghazi, however, was limited to Diplomatic Security professionals and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. The Committees' review shows that the leadership failure in relation to security and policy in Benghazi extended to the highest levels of the State Department, including Secretary Clinton.

But Shinnick says the claim that Clinton's signature on the cable indicates her involvement misrepresents how the State Department operates. He said many directives and orders come through that office without the secretary personally reviewing each.



"Every single cable going out is signed 'Clinton,' it is the normal procedure," Shinnick said. "Millions of cables come into the operation center every year, not thousands, millions. And they are all addressed Hillary Clinton."

"So you can make a story that Hillary saw a cable and didn't act on it or sent a cable out; it's all bullshit, it's all total bullshit," Shinnick stressed. "I can't be any clearer than that. I read those stories and fortunately or unfortunately the people on the ARB understood that. If you don't want to believe that, then go chase a story."

Specifically, the ARB [report](#) cited four State Department officials for criticism, but did not mention Clinton:

The Board found that certain senior State Department officials within two bureaus in critical positions of authority and responsibility in Washington demonstrated a lack of proactive leadership and management ability appropriate for the State Department's senior ranks in their responses to security concerns posed by Special Mission Benghazi, given the deteriorating threat environment and the lack of reliable host government protection.

However, the Board did not find that any individual U.S. Government employee engaged in misconduct or willfully ignored his or her responsibilities, and, therefore did not find reasonable cause to believe that an individual breached his or her duty so as to be the subject of a recommendation for disciplinary action.

"I stand by that, I signed the report, the four people, that's where we tracked it through,"

Shinnick said.

Shinnick's past foreign service has included serving as deputy executive director of the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs and deputy director for operations of the Foreign Buildings Office, which is now the Overseas Buildings Operations.

He noted that so many directives are issued and decisions made under Clinton that she or any Secretary of State are unable to personally review each.

"She has undersecretaries, there's deputy secretaries, they have assistant secretaries," he said. "The assistant secretaries are presidential appointees specifically responsible for those duties. I am sure there are people who would like to connect the Secretary of State to that. There could be a shortage of drinking water somewhere and [critics would say] 'why doesn't Hilary send water?'"

Shinnick's comments are consistent with [several media reports](#) finding that all such messages from the State Department to diplomatic facilities abroad are sent out over the secretary's signature.

Another State Department veteran who agreed with Shinnick's view is Michael A. Newton, a professor at Vanderbilt University Law School and former senior advisor to the Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes from 1999 to 2002.

"There are many, many layers over any action between the secretary and any desk officer or a staff officer," said Newton. "It takes a lot of effort to get something personally in front of the secretary. It's a very complex place to work."