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John McCain, Lindsey Graham Stand By Susan Rice Claims Despite Release Of Benghazi Emails [UPDATE]

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WASHINGTON -- Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) on Tuesday showed no interest in apologizing for their previous assertions that UN Ambassador Susan Rice played a key role in the Obama administration's response to the Sept. 11, 2012, attack on the U.S. outpost in Benghazi, Libya, even though the full set of emails released by the White House last week prove otherwise.

"No, of course not," McCain said, when asked by The Huffington Post if the release of the emails had led him to reconsider his earlier contention that Rice misled the American people. "Listen, there was a deputy's meeting the night before where they made the final determination. Clearly, the White House played a very important role. The White House has denied that they played any role. We know now that they did."

"My belief is Susan Rice is neither blameless for her performance of passing on misinformation, nor should she be the scapegoat," Graham told HuffPost.

"She should be apologizing to Greg Hicks, who said when he heard what she had to say, his jaw dropped and his heart stopped and he was embarrassed," he added, [referring to the testimony](#) Hicks, former deputy chief of mission in Libya, delivered at a House congressional hearing earlier this month.

The White House [disclosed 100 pages of emails](#) last Wednesday detailing how the administration formulated talking points to describe the attack. The emails showed that several government agencies drove the changes to the final set of talking points that Rice used on a fateful series of Sunday show appearances. In addition to containing no evidence of any political interference by the White House, the emails also confirmed that Rice [played no role](#) in developing the response.

Some have since [wondered](#) if McCain, Graham and Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) might apologize for leading a [months-long crusade](#) against Rice that ultimately led to the UN ambassador [withdrawing her name](#) from consideration for secretary of state.

White House spokesman Dan Pfeiffer [argued on Sunday](#) that Republicans owed Rice an apology.

"Frankly, I think that many of the Republicans who had been talking about this, now that they've seen the emails, owe Ambassador Rice an apology for the things they've said about her in the wake of the attack," Pfeiffer said on ABC's "This Week."

Asked what the senators should apologize for, Pfeiffer responded, "For accusing her of misleading the country, for saying that she didn't -- that somehow she was involved in some sort of political whitewash of what happened there."

"What she said was what the intelligence community believed at the time," he said. "And when we got further information, we told the American people what that was. That's how people know what happened here."

Graham argued that Rice was still guilty of misinforming the public and said he found political undertones to her actions.

"She not only regurgitated talking points that were completely false in terms of what the true facts were, she said the consulate was significantly and strongly secured. No one has suggested that," Graham said. "She also suggested that al Qaeda leadership had been decimated."

"I think both of those statements show a willingness on her part, seven weeks before the election, to sell a political narrative rather than the facts," he added.

A spokesman for Ayotte did not immediately return a request for comment.

McCain insisted there were still a lot of questions that remain unanswered.

"We still don't know the names of the survivors. We still haven't had any interviews with them," he said. "There's now more questions to be

answered than there were eight months ago."

He also weighed in on the possibility of Rice being named [Obama's national security adviser](#), noting to reports that the decision would be beyond his control.

"That's not up to me ... That's a choice of the president," McCain said. "I would say that she would be carrying a lot of baggage if she were named it, but that's a decision made by the president, not a confirmable post by [the Senate]."

UPDATE: 8:55 p.m. -- Ayotte also stands by her past comments on Rice, her spokesman Jeff Grappone confirmed to HuffPost.

"On September 16, 2012, Ambassador Rice went well beyond the talking points and made misleading statements to the American people. Her statement that 'we've decimated al Qaeda' was not in the talking points and was patently false," Grappone wrote in an emailed statement. "From Iraq to Libya, the threat from al Qaeda affiliates to the United States and our interests was growing, and Ambassador Rice's comments presented a false picture to the American people."

"In addition, Ambassador Rice repeatedly suggested that the United States had a strong security presence in Benghazi," he added. "That statement was also not in the talking points and was proven false by the successful attack and the subsequent whistleblower testimony."

This article was earlier updated with comments from Lindsey Graham.

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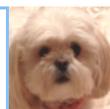
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Republicans aren't smart enough to admit when they are wrong, as a matter of fact, they aren't human enough to know what being wrong is, they think if you just keep saying something over and over with conviction, before you know it everybody will believe it. They not only live in the 19th century ideologically, they live in a fantasy world as well, their own blue heaven where everything is whatever they say it is. McCain is way past his usefulness, he should retire.

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The emails released proved that Susan Rice had nothing to do with the talking points that she was given by the Intelligence Community.

The emails further proved that the emails that were given to ABC were altered to contain GOP talking points. Where's the outrage from the Republicans about that?

These Republican Senators will never admit that they were wrong, that they made false statements over and over and over about Susan Rice. Johnny Mc called Susan Rice "not very bright" and "not qualified" to be Secretary of State.