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SENATORS McCAIN, GRAHAM AND AYOTTE RELEASE STATEMENT ON BENGHAZI ATTACK

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Washington, D.C. – Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) today released the following statement on what we do know and what we still do not know about the attack on the U.S. Special Mission facility in Benghazi, Libya that killed four brave Americans on September 11, 2012:

“What we know:

- Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was not aware of the classified cable that, according to published media reports, Ambassador Chris Stevens sent in August 2012 stating that the U.S. Special Mission facility in Benghazi could not survive a sustained assault from one or more of the militia groups that were operating in eastern Libya. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that he was ‘surprised’ to learn that Secretary Clinton had never seen the cable.
- After the initial reports about the attack in Benghazi, Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey met with President Obama during a previously scheduled meeting. Both Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that this was the last time either of them spoke with the President during the attack in Benghazi. We also know that the President spoke for nearly one hour that

night with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and held a press conference on the attack at the White House the following morning before departing for a political campaign event in Las Vegas, Nevada. We do not know what other actions the President took during the attack in Benghazi.

- The FBI debriefed U.S. personnel who were evacuated from Benghazi on September 12, 2012. It took multiple days before those reports, which made clear that there never was a spontaneous protest outside of the U.S. Mission in Benghazi, were provided to the U.S. intelligence community.
- On September 16, 2012, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, claimed the attack was a spontaneous reaction to the disgusting video, immediately after the President of the Libyan General National Congress said clearly that it was a preplanned attack that included members of al Qaeda.
- General Dempsey testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that the U.S. military did not provide additional support to the U.S. Mission in Benghazi prior to September 11, 2012 because they never received a request to do so – despite the fact that the U.S. Mission in Benghazi had been attacked twice in the preceding months, and despite Ambassador Stevens’ August cable stating that the U.S. Mission in Benghazi could not survive a sustained attack by militants operating in the area.
- Secretary Panetta testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that ‘there was no question in my mind it was a terrorist attack.’ Similarly, Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, has cited a transcript of a September 14, 2012 meeting between then-CIA Director David Petraeus and the members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, in which, according to Senator Feinstein, ‘Petraeus very clearly said that it was a terrorist attack.’
- In an address on the morning of September 12, 2012, President Obama spoke of ‘acts of terror,’ but later that day, in an interview with CBS’s ‘60 Minutes,’ he refused to characterize the attack in Benghazi as a terrorist attack. He then spent nearly two additional weeks claiming that he did not know whether the incident in Benghazi was a terrorist attack, contrary to what the then-Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have said that they believed to be true at the time. The *Washington Post* gave ‘Four Pinocchios’ to the President’s claim that he referred to the attack in Benghazi as terrorism on September 12, 2012.
- 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. Across the broader Middle East, 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. That statement was also not in the talking points and was proven false by the successful attack and the subsequent whistleblower testimony.

“What we do not know:

- We do not know whether the President was made aware of the classified cable that, according to published media reports, Ambassador Chris Stevens sent in August 2012, stating that the U.S. Mission in Benghazi could not survive a sustained assault from one or more of the threatening militia groups that were operating in eastern Libya.
- We do not know whether the President’s national security staff made him aware of the attacks on the U.S. Mission in Benghazi that occurred in April and June of last year and the assassination attempt on the British Ambassador in Benghazi around the same time.
- If the President was informed, we do not know what actions, if any, he ordered.
- We do not know who within U.S. Special Operations Command, Africa ordered a U.S. special forces detachment in Tripoli not to go to Benghazi to assist the Americans under attack, and why that “stand down” order was given, as the former Deputy Chief of Mission in Tripoli, Gregory Hicks, testified to Congress.
- We do not know why, on the anniversary of the worst terrorist attack in American history, after multiple attacks last year on U.S. and Western interests in Libya, and with rising insecurity in countries across the Middle East, U.S. military units and assets in the region were not ready, alert, and positioned to respond in a timely fashion to what should have been a foreseeable emergency – despite the fact that there is a U.S. military base in Souda Bay, Crete, which is a short flight to Benghazi.
- We do not know what the President did or who he was in contact with during the seven hours of the attack, and we do not know why the President did not reach out to Libyan President Magariaf during that period of time.
- We still do not know the names of the survivors of the Benghazi attack, and they have not been interviewed by the Congress.
- We do not know why the testimonies of the U.S. personnel who were evacuated from Benghazi on September 12, 2012 – eyewitnesses who knew there never was a demonstration outside the U.S. Mission – were not shared in a timely way with, and immediately factored in to the judgments of, our intelligence community.
- We do not know whether this failure reflects obstacles that still exist to the free sharing of information across executive branch agencies, which was a key concern of the 9/11 Commission.
- We do not know why the Administration did not do more to support and assist the new Libyan government that took power after the fall of Qaddafi, including in the establishment of civilian-led national security forces that operate under central government control, a counterterrorism force that is trained and equipped to combat Al Qaeda and its affiliates, national justice and prison systems, and effective control over the immense stockpiles of weapons and dangerous materials that exist across Libya. The result of this ‘light footprint’ approach was that Al-Qaeda, its affiliated groups, and local militias were able to establish sanctuaries almost uncontested in the ungoverned spaces of eastern Libya. Some of these individuals were involved in the attack on the U.S. Mission in Benghazi.”

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