

**Ranking Member Opening Statement
Open Hearing with Michael Morell
April 2, 2014**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I first want to take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership of our Committee. Your commitment to bi-partisanship and your dedication to finding solutions to the country's most pressing national security problems have transformed this Committee into a shining example of what good can come when we work together.

We have a wide diversity of opinions on this Committee. We disagree, we argue, but we always focus on the endgame and how to get there together. And each of us respects and gets along with the other.

Your leadership and the spirit of bi-partisanship you fostered has resulted in a Committee with an unparalleled track record of accomplishment—passing intelligence authorization acts every year, passing cyber security legislation, and proposing bi-partisan FISA reform that ends bulk collection of metadata, increases privacy and civil liberties, and preserves an important capability.

The Committee will miss you and your leadership. But, we still have you until the end of this Congress, and we know that you will continue to roll up your sleeves to do the work the American people have come to expect of this bi-partisan Committee.

Today, as we turn our attention to the tragic events in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, we know that there were many heroes and many people who suffered great loss that day.

We mourn the deaths of Ambassador Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, and we honor the other men and women who acted courageously that day to save the lives of others. No one left a comrade behind.

We owe it to them and to the countless others who risk their lives to defend America to find out what went wrong to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Which is what we're doing. The independent Accountability Review Board headed by Admiral Mike Mullen and Ambassador Thomas Pickering completed a comprehensive review of the situation and issued 29 recommendations. The Government is implementing those recommendations, especially when it comes to increasing security.

We in Congress have also combed through every aspect of this tragedy.

We have run down every allegation and every theory, no matter how far-fetched. On this Committee alone we have reviewed thousands of classified documents, watched frame after frame of security video, and interviewed the key intelligence individuals on the ground.

We have also found areas that can—and must—be improved to prevent future tragedies.

But, to date we have found absolutely no inappropriate motivations.

Specific to today's hearing, we have also found no conspiracies in the editing of the Talking Points—only never-ending conspiracy theories.

I was the one who asked for the Talking Points in the days immediately following the tragedy. I asked for them to aid our ability on this Committee to communicate with the American people without revealing classified information.

Through exhaustive review, we have only found evidence that the Talking Points were edited to ensure accuracy, to check classification, and to safeguard the investigation and eventual prosecution—which has to be our ultimate goal: finding and holding accountable those who committed this terrible act.

And this is the third time we have had Mr. Morell before this Committee to talk about Benghazi.

In my dealings with him, Mr. Morell has been frank, honest and forthcoming, and I expect he will be so again today.

So, after today, I hope we can get back to our more pressing work on the Committee: overseeing the intelligence community, passing Intelligence Authorization Acts, improving cybersecurity, and reforming FISA.

In the meantime, let me say thank you, Mr. Morell, for being so willing to come before the Committee, even after you have retired. Your service to this country for over 30 years has been exemplary, and we all owe you, and the people in the CIA you led-- especially those deployed in hotspots around the world-- a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Question

Mr. Morell, there are some who try to accuse you of overriding the assessment of U.S. personnel “on the ground,” saying you would need “overwhelming and conclusive evidence” to do so since the Chief of Station’s assessment “in most every case” is considered “gospel.”

For those of us who know what a Chief of Station does, this accusation sounds uninformed. Chiefs of Station are senior field intelligence collectors, not analysts, particularly because intelligence comes from many sources? Chief of Station assessments are taken very seriously, of course, but their word is not taken as gospel, isn’t that right?

And for those of us who know our geography, we also know that the Chiefs of Station are based in capitols, and Benghazi is not the capitol of Libya. In fact, Tripoli is 632 miles away from Benghazi. That is like saying someone in Chicago or Montreal knows the ground truth for an event in Washington, D.C.

Furthermore, the personnel from Tripoli did not arrive until hours after the initial attacks.

Finally, the Chief of Station in Tripoli that night said to us that the way you handled his email was perfectly appropriate. You received his initial assessment on September 15, and immediately you asked him to elaborate and provide more details, correct?