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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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October 25, 2012

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform continues to investigate facts related to the attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012. According to news reports, e-mails from the night of the attack on the Benghazi compound indicate the White House received specific State Department alerts indicating that armed assailants from an Al Qaeda linked terrorist group were responsible.

The State Department's Operations Center issued an email notification to administration officials shortly after the attack began. At 4:05 p.m. on September 11, 2012, individuals within the State Department, Defense Department, and the White House National Security Staff received the following message:

"The Regional Security Officer reports the diplomatic mission is under attack. Embassy Tripoli reports approximately 20 armed people fired shots; explosions have been heard as well. Ambassador Stevens, who is currently in Benghazi, and four [Chief of Mission] personnel are in the compound safe haven. The 17th of February militia is providing security support."

This State Department alert did not mention any spontaneous crowd or protest preceding the attack.

Approximately two hours later, the State Department Operations Center issued an update stating that the Al Qaeda linked terrorist organization Ansar al-Sharia had claimed responsibility for the attack via Facebook and Twitter. This report was also immediately transmitted throughout relevant national security agencies in your administration including the White House Situation Room.

Ansar al-Sharia is a known terrorist organization operating in northern Africa. According to an unclassified August 2012 report by the Library of Congress, the group is led by former

Guantanamo Bay detainee Sufian Ben Qhumu.¹ In June 2012, the group “staged a large-scale rally and military show of force involving dozens of military vehicles, with Islamists wearing the Afghan mujahidin’s traditional outfit” in Benghazi.²

The Committee is concerned that this important report in an inter-agency dialogue appears to have been discarded in favor of different conclusions that have since been found to be false. We request your assistance in understanding why this report was disregarded for weeks in favor of flawed conclusions about a spontaneous protest. More importantly, the Committee is interested in learning how the failure to immediately recognize this as a terrorist attack affected the administration’s response.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and may at “any time” investigate “any matter” as set forth in House Rule X. As an independent branch of government, it is imperative that our investigation is conducted concurrently with any current or future investigation by the executive branch. The American people deserve a transparent account of these events.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact us. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa
Chairman



Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security,
Homeland Defense,
and Foreign Operations

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Minority Member

The Honorable John F. Tierney, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations

¹ *Al-Qaeda in Libya: A Profile*, The Library of Congress, August 2012, at p.2.

² *Id.*, at p. 32.