THE ROAD AHEAD FOR A BENGHAZI COMMITTEE

Thanks to the testimony of whistleblowers last week, and subsequent reporting of how "talking points" were systematically scrubbed of every reference to the truth, we know for sure President Barack Hussein Obama and senior aides were lying when they blamed a Youtube video for the attack on our consulate in Benghazi.

More important is what is being covered up. To get to the bottom of what may be more a looming national security crisis than a scandal in the past, we must have answers to these critical questions:

*In only 14 of 264 diplomatic posts was the threat of terrorist attack deemed "high" or "critical." Two were our embassy in Tripoli and the consulate in Benghazi. Despite this -- and despite the fact the CIA was running an op out of the annex there -- security at the consulate was well below the minimum standard set by the State Department. There had been 14 Special Forces soldiers assigned to guard the embassy in Tripoli. That was cut to 4 last July.

Why was security in Benghazi so lax? Why did the State Department ignore pleas from Ambassador Chris Stevens and Regional Security Officer Eric Nordstrom for more? Why was the number of Diplomatic Security Service officers assigned to Libya reduced?

Who decided to put security for the consulate chiefly in the hands of an Islamist militia with ties to al Qaida? Why?

It was routine in the Bush administration to beef up security as the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks approached. Why wasn't this done on the eve of the tenth anniversary?

*Gregory Hicks, the Deputy Chief of Mission in Libya, testified that a small Special Forces team was prepared to go to the rescue of the consulate, but was ordered twice to "stand down." This contradicts the assertion by administration officials that no "stand down" orders were issued. Who issued the stand down order? Why?

Former Navy SEALs Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty, were CIA security contractors in Libya They told their superiors they were going to help, were ordered to stand down, but went anyway, according to "sources who were on the ground," reported Jennifer Griffin of Fox News. Who ordered them to stand down? Why?

Before they were killed by mortar rounds, Woods and Doherty were shining a laser designator on the location of the terrorist mortar team and calling out coordinates on the radio, according to Ms. Griffin's "sources who were on the ground." Since this would give away their position to the terrorists, it's unlikely the former SEALs would do this unless they thought there was a US Spectre gunship overhead that could take out the mortar. Did they have a reason for thinking that?

*There were sensitive documents kept in both places, but the burned and looted sites of the consulate and annex were unsecured for days afterward. Journalists -- including the CNN reporter who found Ambassador Stevens' diary -- wandered through them unmolested, so it doesn't seem plausible this duty was neglected out of concern for the safety of Americans.

Journalists have conducted in-person interviews with the ringleaders of the attacks, so why can't the FBI find them? Why did the FBI wait until last week to send out photos of the suspects?

Why have the 31 Americans who survived the attack been prevented from telling their stories to Congress?

When a U.S. ambassador and three other Americans are killed, we must hold those who were negligent (or worse) to account. But the more urgent reason for finding answers to these questions is because they likely are tied to President Obama's policy of outreach to Islamists.

Learning the truth about Benghazi may tell us whether the president's policy is endangering the lives of Americans, and give Congress the leverage to force him to change a disastrous course before it causes a calamity of enormous proportions.

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The next step should be for the House of Representatives to form a Select Committee, armed with subpoena power, to investigate what was going on before and during the attack on 9/11/2012, and what's been happening since.

The Oversight Committee, in particular Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-UT, chairman of the terrorism subcommittee, has done fine work. But its members are relatively junior. It lacks the expertise and staff resources to explore fully the many ramifications of this scandal.

The disjointed manner in which it must conduct its hearings - with questioning jumping from Member to Member for periods of 5 minutes or less - makes it all but impossible to get to the bottom of a particular issue with a witness or witnesses, and only the committees which authorize their budgets can put real fear into the bureaucracies of the departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security, and the CIA.

The Benghazi Committee should consist of 12 Republicans and 9 Democrats --- the same as the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. It should be chaired by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va, because (a) the Select Committee is his idea; (b) he is a very senior Republican, but is not now chairman of a major committee, so he could devote his full attention to this inquiry, and (c) he is well versed in this issue and this type of inquiry, having been instrumental in creating the National Commission on Terrorism in 1998, and the Iraq Study Group in 2005.

Next in seniority should be Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Ca, chairman of the Oversight Committee; Rep. Buck McKeon, R-Cal, chairman of the Armed Services Committee; Rep. Ed Royce, R-Ca, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee; Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Tex, chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, and Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich, chairman of the Intelligence Committee.

They should be on the committee because they have expertise and contacts on particular aspects of the scandal, staff resources they can lend to the effort, and because they can put real fear into bureaucrats at State, Defense, Homeland Security and CIA. But because they have important day jobs, we can't expect them to do much more than show up for hearings and ask a few relevant questions. (An exception, I hope, will be Rep. Rogers, a former Army officer and special agent of the FBI.)

So the heavy lifting on the Benghazi Committee will have to be done by:

*Rep. Chaffetz. He's sharp, and no Member is more familiar with the subject.

*Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-SC. A junior member of the Oversight Committee, but one of its sharpest tacks, as we saw last week's hearing. He was a federal prosecutor before being elected to Congress.

*Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Ca. He chairs the Emerging Threats subcommittee on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and had the stones to sneak into Afghanistan with Jack Wheeler during the war with the Soviets. He's sharp, honest, passionate about the issue, and he's our bud.

The final three I'd put on the Benghazi Committee are Rep. Michael Grimm, R-NY, Rep. Tom Cotton, R-Ark, and Rep. Jim Bridenstine, R-OK. They're all very junior (Grimm's in his second term; Cotton and Bridenstine are freshmen), but they are among the GOP's brightest young stars; the fact they are so junior means they've nothing more important to do, and they have special expertise.

Grimm is a Marine veteran of the first Gulf War and a former FBI special agent. Cotton is the only Harvard law grad to become an Army Ranger. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bridenstine is a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve. He flew F/A-18 Hornets in Irag and Afghanistan.

The Benghazi Committee should - as the Senate Watergate Committee did --- hire a special counsel to direct investigative activities, and to do the initial questioning of witnesses at hearings. The special counsel should be wise in the ways of Washington and very familiar with national security issues. Former Sen. Fred Thompson, R-Tenn, Minority Counsel on the Watergate Committee, would be a good choice. So would be Andy McCarthy, who prosecuted the mastermind of the first World Trade Center bombing.

The Benghazi Committee also should have its own media guy (Cliff May of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a former foreign correspondent for the New York Times, would be a good choice), and one or two full time investigators (one of whom should be a recently retired SEAL or Green Beret with excellent contacts among his former colleagues.

Additional staff can be detailed on a full or part time basis from the staffs of the Oversight, Armed Services, Foreign Affairs, Homeland Security and Intelligence Committees, and/or from the personal staffs of the Select Committee members.

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It won't be bad if journalists note similarities between the Benghazi Committee and the Watergate Committee, but Republicans and conservatives must stay far away from the "I" word. We must learn the truth to illuminate and force changes in a dangerously flawed policy. **Democrats and their allies in the news media want desperately to dismiss this as a partisan witch hunt.** We must not provide them with ammunition.

There were good reasons to be against the impeachment of President Clinton as a **matter of policy**. (His conduct with Monica Lewinsky was disgusting and despicable, but not related to his official duties. His lying about it under oath in that deposition in Arkansas is, technically, perjury, but also had little relationship to his official duties.

The proper thing for the special prosecutor to have done was to issue a sealed indictment, to be served the moment Clinton's successor's hand came off the Bible.)

And because it was **an exercise in futility**. (Had the half-eaten remains of small children been found in the Oval Office, Senate Democrats still would not have voted to remove Clinton from office.)

And because it was **sure to backfire**. (Impeachment proceedings shifted the emphasis from the president's despicable behavior to GOP overreach. Customarily, the out party gains seats in Congress in the 6th year of a presidential term. In 1998, the GOP lost five seats in the House.)

If there is premature talk of impeachment over Benghazi, Republicans will blow it again. **And talk of impeachment is wildly premature**. We know for a fact there's been a coverup. But all the evidence to date indicates is that what is being covered up is negligence - gross negligence -- but not a crime like burglary. And much of the negligence being covered up may be the fault of bureaucrats at State, Defense and CIA, not by the president or political appointees.

There is an ugly possibility that would justify - even make mandatory - impeachment proceedings. Kevin Dujan speculates the administration made a deal with Egyptian President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood to permit the kidnapping of Ambassador Stevens, who would

then be exchanged for the Blind Sheikh. Morsi would get what he seeks most; by arranging for the safe return of Ambassador Stevens, Obama would look like a hero on the eve of the election.

This theory could explain why:
(a) Hillary Clinton asked Stevens to go to Benghazi on 9/11/2012;
(b) Woods, Doherty, and LtCol. Gibson were ordered to stand down;
(c) the person or persons who told Mark Thompson not to mobilize the FEST team thought they knew how long the attack would last;
(d) Stevens - who was asphyxiated in a fire - was taken to a hospital and an attempt made to revive him, and
(e) the administration has prevented the 31 survivors of the attacks on the consulate proper and the annex from telling their stories to members of Congress.

But as of now, this is all just speculation. There should be no talk of impeachment unless and until proof of this (or something equally sinister, such as the speculation about a Uriah Mission in Afghanistan) is unearthed.

Hearings by the Benghazi Committee during the August recess could make for riveting television the broadcast nets couldn't ignore. The truth about Benghazi, coupled with the IRS scandal and the problems sure to arise from implementation of Obamacare could make the 2014 midterms as bad for the Dems as the 1974 midterms were for the GOP. But only if we keep our focus on finding the truth.

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