

Final Benghazi report: No 'smoking gun' pointing to Clinton

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans on Tuesday concluded their \$7 million, two-year investigation into the deadly attacks in Benghazi, Libya, with fresh accusations of lethal mistakes by the Obama administration but no "smoking gun" pointing to wrongdoing by Hillary Clinton, then secretary of state and now the Democrats' presumptive presidential nominee.

After the long investigation, filled with partisan sniping by panel members, none of the new revelations highlighted by the House Benghazi committee in its 800-page report pointed specifically to Clinton's actions before, during or after the Sept. 11, 2012, attacks on the U.S. diplomatic outpost and CIA annex in the eastern Libyan city.

Four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens, died in the attacks. Allegations against Clinton were a main impetus behind the House Republicans' creation of the politically charged, Water-gate-style select committee. Clinton testified before the panel for nearly 11 hours last fall.

While the panel's GOP members took shots at Clinton on Tuesday, Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., the chairman, summed up the document by asking "the American people to read this report for themselves, look at the evidence we have collected and reach their own conclusions."

In Denver, Clinton dismissed the report as an echo of previous probes with no new discoveries. "I think it's pretty clear it's time to move on," she said during a campaign stop.

Hardly — especially in the heat of an election. Republican rival Donald Trump, although silent on the subject Tuesday, has frequently lashed out at Clinton over Benghazi.

Nearly four years ago, the Libya attacks became immediate political fodder, given their timing in the weeks before President Barack Obama's re-election, and that has not abated despite seven previous congressional investigations. There has been finger-pointing on both sides over security at the U.S. diplomatic outpost in Benghazi and whether Clinton and the White House initially tried to portray the

assault as a protest over an offensive, anti-Muslim video, instead of a calculated terrorist attack.

Republican insistence that the investigation was not politically motivated was undermined last year when House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., suggested that the committee could take credit for Clinton's then-slumping poll numbers.

His statements helped dash his chances of becoming House Speaker.

The committee interviewed more than 100 witnesses and reviewed some 75,000 pages of documents, but an almost accidental discovery by the panel last year has shadowed Clinton's candidacy. The committee disclosed that she had used a private email server to conduct government business while serving as secretary of state, a practice that has drawn widespread scrutiny, including an FBI investigation.

Already bitterly partisan, Tuesday's release of the report exposed divisions within Republican ranks.

Reps. Mike Pompeo of Kansas and Jim Jordan of Ohio issued a

separate report slamming Clinton and the Obama administration, with Pompeo telling reporters that the former first lady and senator was "morally reprehensible." Clinton's public comments casting the attack as a possible protest over the anti-Muslim video differed sharply from her private assessments to her daughter, Chelsea, and foreign diplomats, Jordan and Pompeo said.

Gowdy, however, deflected questions about her, saying the report "is not about one person."

The GOP report severely criticizes the military, CIA and administration officials for their response as the attacks unfolded, and their subsequent explanations to the American people.

On the night of Sept. 11, a large group of men rushed into the diplomatic compound in Benghazi, firing guns and setting fires. Visiting Ambassador Stevens and computer specialist Sean Smith were killed despite taking cover in a safe room.

Hours later, before dawn, mortar fire hit the CIA roof nearby, killing security contractors Tyrone Woods

and Glen Doherty.

The report found that Libyan military officers loyal to former leader Moammar Gadhafi, whom the U.S. had helped depose, had taken part in rescuing the remaining Americans.

"Not a single wheel of a single U.S. military asset had even turned toward Libya," Gowdy complained.

U.S. military leaders told the committee they thought an evacuation was imminent, slowing any response.

The committee's five Democrats denounced the Republicans' report as "a conspiracy theory on steroids — bringing back long-debunked allegations with no credible evidence whatsoever."

Democrats released their own report Monday saying that while the State Department's security measures in Benghazi were "woefully inadequate," Clinton never personally turned down a request for additional security. The military could not have done anything differently that night to save the lives of the Americans, Democrats said.



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