

Was Obama Asleep While Americans Were Killed?

by EIR Staff

Feb. 12—The questions raised with Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey, at the Feb. 7 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Benghazi, covered a lot of ground—including the reasons for lack of security at the compound, the lack of military response, and other details. But the revelation which “had legs,” and is creating a firestorm around the *criminal negligence* by the President, is the report that Obama had *no contact* with these top military officials, following a short briefing on the incident, for the entire evening while the attack which killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans, was underway.

As a result of this revelation, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) declared on CBS’s Face the Nation Feb. 10, that he would hold up the nomination of both John Brennan as CIA Director, and Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defense, until answers on Benghazi were forthcoming.

Senator Graham’s threat echoes that of Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.), who declared during the Feb. 7 Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, that he would hold up Brennan’s confirmation until the Senate received documents it had requested on the Benghazi attack.

What was Obama Doing?

The first Senator to raise the question of how the President personally responded to news of the Benghazi attack, at the Feb. 7 hearings, was Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.). The exchange, as presented by the Congressional Quarterly transcript, and slightly edited here, went as follows:

Ayotte: Secretary Panetta, you said you were in a briefing with the president of the United States, I believe it was about 5:00 our time. And you had just learned about the incident on the consulate.

What conversation did you have with the president?

What did he ask you to do as a result of this attack? And throughout the night what communications were you having with him?”

Panetta: ...At the time we were concerned about Cairo and demonstrations in Cairo, and then we had just picked up the information that—that something was happening, there was an apparent attack going on in Benghazi.

And I informed the president of that fact. And he at that point directed both myself and General Dempsey to do everything we needed to do to try to protect lives there.

Ayotte: Did he ask you how long it would take to deploy assets, including armed...

Panetta: No... He basically said do whatever you need to do to be able to protect our people there.

Ayotte: So he didn’t ask you what ability we had in the area and what we could do?

Panetta: No. I think—I mean he—he relied on—on both myself as secretary and on General Dempsey’s capabilities. He knows generally what we’ve deployed into the region. We’ve presented that to him in other briefings. So he knew generally what was deployed out there. But as to specifics about time, et cetera, et cetera, no, he just left that up to us.

Ayotte: Did you have any further communications with him that night?

Panetta: No.

Ayotte: Did you have any other further communications? Did he ever call you that night to say, “How are things going? What’s going on? Where’s the consulate?”

Panetta: No, but we were aware that as we were getting information on what was taking place there, particularly when we got information that the ambassador, his life had been lost, we were aware that that information went to the White House.



DoD photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley, U.S. Navy

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey, admitted that President Obama had no contact with them, after an initial short briefing, during the 7-8 hour attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi Sept. 11, 2012.

Ayotte: Did you communicate with anyone else at the White House that night?

Panetta: No. . . .

Ayotte: But just to be clear, that night he [the President] didn't ask you what assets we had available and how quickly they could respond, and what we could do to help those individuals there?

Panetta: The biggest problem that night, Senator, was that nobody knew really what was going on there.

Ayotte: And there was no follow-up during the night, at least from the White House directly?

Panetta: No—no, there wasn't.

Graham Follows Up

Soon afterwards, Senator Graham took up Ayotte's line of questioning. He asked Secretary Panetta:

Your testimony, as I understand it, Secretary Panetta, is that you talked with the president of the United States one time?

Panetta: I talked to him on September 11th with regard to the fact that we were aware this attack was taking place.

Graham: One time?

Panetta: Right.

Graham: What time did you tell him that?

Panetta: I think that was approximately about 5:00—about 5:00.

Graham: General Dempsey, did you ever talk to

the president of the United States at all?

Dempsey: I was with the secretary at that same time.

Graham: Did you talk to the president?

Dempsey: Yes.

Graham: You talked to him how many times?

Dempsey: The same one time.

Graham: How long did the conversation last?

Dempsey: We were there in the office for probably 30 minutes.

Graham: So you talked to him for 30 minutes, one time, and you never talked to him again, neither one of you?

Dempsey: Until afterwards.

Graham: Until after the attack was over.

Dempsey: That's right.

Drawing Conclusions

It didn't take long for those who were paying attention, to react to Panetta and Dempsey's admission that the President was shockingly disinterested in the fate of his ambassador.

In a column Feb. 8, a former Reagan Administration Assistant Secretary of Defense, Bing West, raised the question of Obama's negligence, in the face of the ongoing Benghazi disaster. "As a Marine, I find that lack of concern—that un-involvement—hard to grasp and impossible to justify," West wrote in a column posted

on the *National Review* website. “If a PFC [private first class] is missing in battle, the entire chain of command focuses its attention and resources like a laser upon his recovery. The commanding general doesn’t talk to his aides for 20 minutes and go to bed.”

“Our ambassador holds the rank equivalent to a four-star general,” West continues. “More important [he] represents our country. He isn’t a symbol of America; he *is* America. No wonder the White House has maintained a wall of silence about Benghazi.”

“That lack of concern is depressing and is the major lesson to take away from Benghazi.”

‘The American People Need To Know’

On Feb. 10, in an interview with Bob Schieffer on CBS-TV’s *Face the Nation*, Senator Graham indicated that he was not going to ignore the issue of the President’s negligence. For example, he asked what the President did about the fact that the U.S. rescue team, that had arrived in Benghazi from Tripoli, was blocked from getting to the compound for several crucial hours.

Graham: They were held up for three and a half hours at the airport, had problems with the militias releasing them and a lot of bureaucratic snafus. Here’s my question—did the president ever pick up the phone and call the Libyan government and say, “let those people out of the airport. They need to get to the annex to protect our people under siege?” Did the president at any time during the eight-hour attack pick up the phone and call anybody in Libya to get help for these folks?

Secretary Clinton said she was screaming on the phone at Libyan officials. There’s no voice in the world like that of the president of the United States. And I do believe if he had picked up the phone and called the Libyan government, these folks could have gotten out of the airport to the annex and the last two guys may very well be alive.

And if he did call the Libyan officials and they sort of blew him off, that would affect whether or not I would give foreign aid in the future to Libya. But if he failed to call on behalf of those people under siege, and I think that’s a massive failure of leadership by our commander in chief.

Schieffer: Well, have you tried to find out if he did call?

Graham: I’ve tried. We know he had a 15-minute briefing by Secretary Panetta and the chairman of the

joint chiefs right after the attack happened. It was a pre-planned meeting. It just happened that Benghazi came up at the meeting. I don’t know what the president did that evening. I don’t know if he ever called anyone. I know he never talked to the secretary of defense. I know that he never talked to the chairman of the joint chiefs. And they never talked to anybody at the White House. I know the secretary of state never talked to the secretary of defense.

This was incredibly mismanaged. And what we know now, it seems to be a very disengaged president. Again, if he had lent his voice to this cause, I think it would have made a big difference. And I’m not going to stop until we get an accounting. I’ve pushed back against the Bush administration when they said Iraq was just a few dead-enders. We know nothing about what the president did on the night of September 11 during a time of national crisis, and the American people need to know what their commander in chief did, if anything, during this eight-hour attack.

Schieffer: What can you really do about it? You can ask them what the president was doing. If they don’t give you an answer, what can you do?

Graham: I don’t think we should allow Brennan to go forward [to] the CIA directorship, Hagel to be confirmed for secretary of defense, until the White House gives us an accounting. Did the president ever pick up the phone and call anyone in the Libyan government to help these folks? What did the president do?

We know he talked to the Israeli prime minister from 8:00 to 9:00 on September 11 about a dust-up of a Democratic platform and the fact he didn’t meet the prime minister of Israel when he came to New York to visit the UN. But that’s not related to Libya.

What did he do that night? That’s not unfair. The families need to know. The American people need to know.

Broader Questions

As Graham and other Senators know—from LaRouchePAC, if not elsewhere—Obama’s negligence is only a small part of his crime relative to Benghazi. He has de facto allied the U.S. with the British-Saudi terrorists who killed Ambassador Stevens and the others—all in the interest of the Empire’s plan to destroy national sovereignty globally. From this standpoint, he was not just negligent, but *treasonous*.

It’s up to true American patriots to make sure the Congress acts on the full reality—before it’s too late.