



THE REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

October 4, 2012

Dear Senator Ayotte:

Thank you for your letter of September 25, regarding my public comments in the wake of the despicable attack that killed four U.S. officials in Benghazi, Libya.

Ambassador Chris Stevens was my valued colleague. I had the privilege of working closely with him to bring freedom and hope to the Libyan people. His death, and that of Glen Doherty, Sean Smith and Tyrone Woods, is a tragic and painful loss for all of us.

In my September 16 Sunday show appearances, I was asked to provide the Administration's latest understanding of what had transpired in Benghazi. In answering, I relied solely and squarely on the information the intelligence community provided to me and other senior U.S. officials, including through the daily intelligence briefings that present the latest reporting and analysis to policymakers. This information represented the intelligence community's best, current assessment as of the date of my television appearances, and I went out of my way to ensure that it was consistent with the information that was being given to Congress.

In every instance, I made clear that my comments were based on the best information available *at that time* and that the FBI investigation would ultimately provide the definitive accounting of what transpired in Benghazi. I understand, however, that reading simply the partial quotes in your letter may not convey that full picture. A more complete reading of my statements makes clear that I consistently qualified, in some instances twice, the information I provided as preliminary. For example, on *Meet the Press*, I said:

“Well, let us -- let me tell you the best information we have at present. First of all, there's an FBI investigation, which is ongoing and we look to that investigation to give us the definitive word as to what transpired. But putting together the best information that we have available to us today, our current assessment is that what happened in Benghazi was, in fact, initially a spontaneous reaction to what had just transpired hours before in Cairo; almost a copycat of -- of the demonstrations against our facility in Cairo, which were prompted, of course, by the video.

What we think then transpired in Benghazi is that opportunistic extremist elements came to the consulate as this was unfolding. They came with heavy weapons, which unfortunately, are readily available in post-revolutionary Libya. And it escalated into a much more violent episode. Obviously, that's -- that's our best judgment now. We'll await the results of the investigation, and the President has been very clear: we'll work with the Libyan authorities to bring those responsible to justice."

I also refer you to the September 28, 2012 statement by the Spokesperson for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), describing the U.S. intelligence community's evolving understanding of events:

"As the Intelligence Community collects and analyzes more information related to the attack, our understanding of the event continues to evolve. In the immediate aftermath, there was information that led us to assess that the attack began spontaneously following protests earlier that day at our embassy in Cairo. We provided that initial assessment to Executive Branch officials and members of Congress, who used that information to discuss the attack publicly and provide updates as they became available. Throughout our investigation we continued to emphasize that information gathered was preliminary and evolving." [Statement by ODNI Spokesperson, 9/28/12]

My comments were based on the "initial assessment," referred to above, that was provided to me, other senior U.S. officials, and Member of Congress by the U.S. intelligence community.

As the ODNI stated on September 28, the Benghazi tragedy was "a deliberate and organized terrorist attack carried out by extremists" and "some of those involved were linked to groups affiliated with, or sympathetic to al-Qa'ida." Indeed, on September 16, I explicitly highlighted the likely involvement of extremists, including terrorists, and acknowledged that we would need to determine their identities and affiliations. On *Face the Nation*, I said: "it's clear that there were extremist elements that joined in and escalated the violence. Whether they were al-Qaeda affiliates, whether they were Libyan-based extremists or al-Qaeda itself, I think is one of the things we'll have to determine."

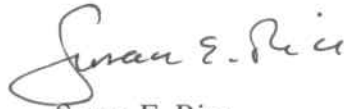
Finally, your letter suggests I used the term "expression of hostility" to describe the vicious terrorist attack on Ambassador Stevens and his colleagues. I did not. I used this phrase in response to a very different question about the trajectory of the protests across the Middle East, and my point was in fact that violent protest is never justified. The full quote is provided in the complete transcripts of my interviews, which are attached.

Senators, I fully share your commitment to protecting all Americans – whether diplomats, servicemen and servicewomen, or citizens – from the threat of terrorism, and trust that my record of service at the UN for nearly four years strongly reflects that.

As you know, the U.S. intelligence community and the FBI have launched a comprehensive effort to determine the circumstances surrounding the assault and to identify the perpetrators of this terrorist attack. The United States Government is committed to a full accounting of the events and to bringing to justice the perpetrators of this heinous act.

The Department of State will continue to share information as appropriate, including the findings of the Accountability Review Board. Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan E. Rice". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" being the most prominent.

Susan E. Rice
U.S. Permanent Representative
to the United Nations

The Honorable
Kelly A. Ayotte,
United States Senate.

Attachment: 9/16 Susan E. Rice transcripts