

May 12, 2013

Jeffery Tucker at [Laissez Faire Today](#) on how government wrecked the gas can. *The gas gauge broke. There was no smartphone app to tell me how much was left, so I ran out. I had to call the local gas station to give me enough to get on my way. The gruff but lovable attendant arrived in his truck and started to pour gas in my car's tank. And pour. And pour.*

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ObamaBS gets derision from [Charles Krauthammer](#).

You know you're in trouble when you can't even get your walk-back story straight. Stung by the worldwide derision that met President Obama's fudging and fumbling of his chemical-weapons red line in Syria, [the White House leaked](#) to the New York Times that Obama's initial statement had been unprepared, unscripted and therefore unserious.

The next day Jay Carney said precisely the opposite: "Red line" was intended and deliberate.

Which is it? Who knows? Perhaps [Obama used the term](#) last August to look tough, sound like a real world leader, never expecting that Syria would do something so crazy. He would have it both ways: sound decisive but never have to deliver.

Or perhaps he thought that Syria might actually use chemical weapons one day, at which point he would think of something.

So far he's thought of nothing. Instead he's backed himself into a corner: Be forced into a war he is firmly resolved to avoid, or lose credibility, which for a superpower on whose word relies the safety of a dozen allies is not just embarrassing but dangerous.

In his recent rambling news conference, Obama said that he needed certainty about the crossing of the red line to keep the “international community” behind him. This is absurd. The “international community” is a fiction, especially in Syria. Russia, Iran and Hezbollah are calling the shots.

Nor, he averred, could he act until he could be sure of everything down to the “chain of custody” of the sarin gas.

What is this? “CSI: Damascus”? ...

Neo-Neocon posts on speechwriters in the administration who get rewarded with real jobs where they are out of their depth.

Several people have mentioned Ben Rhodes in connection with the Benghazi debacle (just Google “Ben Rhodes Benghazi” and you’ll find plenty of the speculation). It’s not at all clear how much responsibility Rhodes had for the decisions during the Benghazi attack and the spin afterward. But what is clear is that Rhodes is one of Obama’s many advisors who lack anything remotely connected with expertise, except in the art of politics and speechwriting. Despite this, for Obama Rhodes doesn’t just write about foreign policy, he helps to make it.

Rhodes’ resume is singularly unimpressive, except after he was tapped by Obama to write for him and then to somehow be a foreign policy “expert.” Rhodes is hardly unique in the Obama administration for having this sort of background. The president seems to prefer to have people around him with even less experience and expertise than he has, which is saying something. ...

Scott Johnson of Power Line quotes David Gelernter on Benghazi revelations.

... It is the Democratic Party that’s on trial today; and to a lesser extent, America’s mainstream media. For Democrats (and especially Democratic senators) it is put-up-or-shut-up time: are they Democrats or Americans first? Obviously their first instinct was to defend the Democratic administration. Republicans would have done the same. But starting with the Hayes story on the Rice propaganda points (and the neo-Soviet process that turned them from truth to lies), and then the Issa hearing Wednesday (and a recent ABC news piece focusing again on the phoned-up talking points), no honest observer can fail to suspect this administration of doing unspeakable things. It is Congress’s duty to find out the truth.

How would Republicans act if a GOP administration were under this sort of cloud? We know exactly how. It was the radically partisan Edward Kennedy who proposed that a senate select committee investigate Watergate—but in February 1973, the Senate voted unanimously to create that committee. Republican Senator Howard Baker was vice chairman, and asked the key question: “What did the president know and when did he know it?” Which Democratic senator will ask that question today, now that the issue isn’t breaking-and-entering but lying about four murders, including the murder of an American ambassador? ...

Jennifer Rubin says this is pointing toward Hillary.

... To begin with, the very compelling witness Gregory Hicks explained to lawmakers that the YouTube video lampooning Muhammad was a non-event; rather, he understood the assault on the Benghazi consulate to be a terrorist attack and briefed Clinton that night. There was no confusion about the attack in that sense. The “spontaneous demonstration” story line did not come from people on the ground or from the intelligence community (who knew from the get-go that al-Qaeda linked operatives were involved). It came from senior administration officials.

Hicks, the State Department’s deputy chief of mission in Libya, asked Beth Jones, the acting assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, why U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice was pinning the incident on the YouTube video. He said he was told not to ask questions.

Then there is the matter of the rescue forces. Among others, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta testified in February that no forces were called and none were told to stand down. The testimony yesterday tells us that isn’t true. (That may have been a correct military judgment, but we’ll never know.) The forces from Aviano Air Base in Italy and a second team of special forces in Tripoli were told to stand down, according to Hicks. He said the military personnel there were “furious. [A military officer told Hicks,] ‘This is the first time in my career that a diplomat has more balls than somebody in the military.’ ” Mark Thompson, the State Department’s deputy coordinator for counterterrorism, also testified, “I was told this was not the right time to deploy the team.”

In the wake of the attack, Hicks testified, he was told not to speak with a congressional delegation visiting Libya. After he participated in a classified briefing without a State Department lawyer present, Cheryl Mills, Hillary Clinton’s chief of staff and sometimes called Hillary’s alter ego at State, contacted Gregory Hicks and told him she was “[very upset](#).” ...

This has become so serious for the administration, they are losing The New Yorker. It’s a cliché, of course, but it really is true: in Washington, every scandal has a crime and a coverup. The ongoing debate about the attack on the United States facility in Benghazi where four Americans were killed, and the Obama Administration’s response to it, is no exception. For a long time, it seemed like the idea of a coverup was just a Republican obsession. But now there is something to it.

On Friday, ABC News’s Jonathan Karl revealed the details of the editing process for the C.I.A.’s talking points about the attack, including the edits themselves and some of the reasons a State Department spokeswoman gave for requesting those edits. It’s striking to see the twelve different iterations that the talking points went through before they were released to Congress and to United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice, who used them in Sunday show appearances that became a central focus of Republicans’ criticism of the Administration’s public response to the attacks. Over the course of about twenty-four hours, the remarks evolved from something specific and fairly detailed into a bland, vague mush.

From the very beginning of the editing process, the talking points contained the erroneous assertion that the attack was “spontaneously inspired by the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and evolved.” That’s an important fact, because the right has always criticized the Administration based on the suggestion that the C.I.A. and the State Department, contrary to

what they said, knew that the attack was not spontaneous and not an outgrowth of a demonstration. But everything else about the changes that were made is problematic. ...

According to [Mary Kissel](#) of WSJ's Political Diary, the Thomas Perez LaborSec nomination might be in trouble.

Are the political winds starting to shift against labor secretary nominee Thomas Perez? Senate Republicans delayed a vote on his nomination Wednesday on a procedural technicality. The hearing is now expected to be held next week. But the more surprising news is that Rep. Elijah Cummings, a Maryland Democrat, called Wednesday for Mr. Perez to comply with a subpoena of his personal email account.

Until now, Democrats have denounced the House investigation into a legal quid pro quo that Mr. Perez negotiated with the City of St. Paul, Minn., last year, in his role as the Justice Department's civil-rights chief. ...

Laissez Faire Today

[How Government Wrecked the Gas Can](#)

by Jeffrey Tucker

The gas gauge broke. There was no smartphone app to tell me how much was left, so I ran out. I had to call the local gas station to give me enough to get on my way. The gruff but lovable attendant arrived in his truck and started to pour gas in my car's tank. And pour. And pour.

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Surely, the gas can is protected. It's just a can, for goodness sake. Yet he was right. This one doesn't have a vent. Who would make a can without a vent unless it was done under duress?

After all, everyone knows to vent anything that pours. Otherwise, it doesn't pour right and is likely to spill.

It took one quick search. The whole trend began in (wait for it) California. Regulations began in 2000, with the idea of preventing spillage. The notion spread and was picked up by the EPA, which is always looking for new and innovative ways to spread as much human misery as possible.

An ominous regulatory announcement from the EPA came in 2007: "Starting with containers manufactured in 2009... it is expected that the new cans will be built with a simple and inexpensive permeation barrier and new spouts that close automatically."

The government never said "no vents." It abolished them de facto with new standards that every state had to adopt by 2009. So for the last three years, you have not been able to buy gas cans that work properly. They are not permitted to have a separate vent. The top has to close automatically. There are other silly things now, too, but the biggest problem is that they do not do well what cans are supposed to do.

And don't tell me about spillage. It is far more likely to spill when the gas is gurgling out in various uneven ways, when one spout has to both pour and suck in air. That's when the lawn mower tank becomes suddenly full without warning, when you are shifting the can this way and that just to get the stuff out.

There's also the problem of the exploding can. On hot days, the plastic models to which this regulation applies can blow up like balloons. When you release the top, gas flies everywhere, including possibly on a hot engine. Then the trouble really begins.

Never heard of this rule? You will know about it if you go to the local store. Most people buy one or two of these items in the course of a lifetime, so you might otherwise have not encountered this outrage.

Yet let enough time go by. A whole generation will come to expect these things to work badly. Then some wise young entrepreneur will have the bright idea, "Hey, let's put a hole on the other side so this can work properly." But he will never be able to bring it into production. The government won't allow it because it is protecting us!

It's striking to me that the websites and institutions that complain about government involvement in our lives never mentioned this, at least not so far as I can tell. The only sites that seem to have discussed this are the boating forums and the lawn forums. These are the people who use these cans more than most. The level of anger and vitriol is amazing to read, and every bit of it is justified.

There is no possible rationale for these kinds of regulations. It can't be about emissions really, since the new cans are more likely to result in spills. It's as if some bureaucrat were sitting around thinking of ways to make life worse for everyone, and hit upon this new, cockamamie rule.

These days, government is always open to a misery-making suggestion. The notion that public policy would somehow make life better is a relic of days gone by. It's as if government has

decided to specialize in what it is best at and adopt a new principle: “Let’s leave social progress to the private sector; we in the government will concentrate on causing suffering and regress.”

You are already thinking of hacks. Why not just stab the thing with a knife and be done with it? If you have to transport the can in the car, that’s a problem. You need a way to plug the vent with something.

Some boating forums have suggested drilling a hole and putting a tire stem in there and using the screw top as the way to close the hole. Great idea. Just what I wanted to do with my Saturday afternoon, hacking the gas can to make it work exactly as well as it did three years ago, before government wrecked it.

You can also buy an old-time metal can. It turns out that special regulations pertain here, too, and it’s all about the spout, which is not easy to fill. They are also unusually expensive. I’m not sure that either of these options is ideal.

It fascinates me to see how these regulations give rise to market-based workarounds. I’ve elsewhere called this the speak-easy economy. The government bans something. No one likes the ban. People are determined to get on with their lives, regardless. They step outside the narrow bounds of the law.

It wouldn’t surprise me to find, for example, a sudden proliferation of heavy-duty “water cans” in 1- and 5-gallon sizes, complete with nice spouts and vents, looking almost exactly like the gas cans you could get anywhere just a few years ago. How very interesting to discover this.

Of course, this law-abiding writer would never advocate buying one of these and using it for some purpose other than what is written on the package. Doing something like that would show profound disrespect for our betters in the bureaucracies. And if I did suggest something like that, there’s no telling the trouble that it would bring down on my head.

Ask yourself this: If they can wreck such a normal and traditional item like this, and do it largely under the radar screen, what else have they mandatorily malfunctioned? How many other things in our daily lives have been distorted, deformed and destroyed by government regulations?

If some product annoys you in surprising ways, there’s a good chance that it is not the invisible hand at work, but rather the regulatory grip that is squeezing the life out of civilization itself.

Washington Post
[Pink line over Damascus](#)
by Charles Krauthammer

You know you’re in trouble when you can’t even get your walk-back story straight. Stung by the worldwide derision that met President Obama’s fudging and fumbling of his chemical-weapons red line in Syria, [the White House leaked](#) to the New York Times that Obama’s initial statement had been unprepared, unscripted and therefore unserious.

[The next day Jay Carney](#) said precisely the opposite: “Red line” was intended and deliberate.

Which is it? Who knows? Perhaps [Obama used the term](#) last August to look tough, sound like a real world leader, never expecting that Syria would do something so crazy. He would have it both ways: sound decisive but never have to deliver.

Or perhaps he thought that Syria might actually use chemical weapons one day, at which point he would think of something.

So far he’s thought of nothing. Instead he’s backed himself into a corner: Be forced into a war he is firmly resolved to avoid, or lose credibility, which for a superpower on whose word relies the safety of a dozen allies is not just embarrassing but dangerous.

In his recent rambling [news conference](#), Obama said that he needed certainty about the crossing of the red line to keep the “international community” behind him. This is absurd. The “international community” is a fiction, especially in Syria. Russia, Iran and Hezbollah are calling the shots.

Nor, he averred, could he act until he could be sure of everything down to the “chain of custody” of the sarin gas.

What is this? “CSI: Damascus”? It’s a savage civil war. The antagonists don’t exactly stand down for forensic sampling.

Some countries have real red lines. Israel has no friends on either side of this regional Sunni-Shiite conflict, but it will not permit the alteration of its strategic military balance with Hezbollah, which is already brimming with [60,000 rockets](#) aimed at Israel.

Everyone in the region knows that the transfer of chemical weapons to Hezbollah or the acquisition of the Fateh-110 missile with the accuracy and range to hit the heart of Tel Aviv, [is a red line](#). Hence the punishing [Israeli airstrikes](#) around Damascus on advanced weaponry making its way to Hezbollah.

The risk to Israel is less a counterattack from Damascus than from Hezbollah. Bashar al-Assad of Syria doesn’t need a new front with Israel. Syria remembers not just its thorough defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967 and 1973 but also its humiliation in the skies over the Bekaa Valley in 1982 when it challenged Israeli air dominance. In a two-day dogfight, Israel shot down 60 Syrian planes and lost none.

Israel’s real concern is a Hezbollah attack. But Hezbollah has already stretched itself thin by [sending fighters into Syria](#) to save Assad. And it knows that war with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would be far more devastating than its [2006 war](#) with the tepid and tentative Ehud Olmert.

Most important, Iran, Hezbollah’s master, wants to keep Hezbollah’s missile arsenal intact and in reserve for retaliation against — and thus deterrence of — a possible Israeli attack on Iran’s nuclear program.

These are complicated, inherently risky calculations. But living in the midst of this cauldron, Israel has no choice. It must act.

America does have a choice. It can afford to stay out. And at this late date, it probably will.

Early in the war, before the rise of the jihadists to dominance within the Syrian opposition, intervention might have brought down Assad and produced a decent successor government friendly to American and non-belligerent to its neighbors.

Today our only hope seems to be supporting and arming Salim Idriss, the one rebel commander who speaks in moderate, tolerant tones. But he could easily turn, or could be overwhelmed by the jihadists. As they say in the Middle East, you don't buy allies here. It's strictly a rental.

Israel's successful strikes around Damascus show that a Western no-fly zone would not require a massive Libyan-style campaign to take out all Syrian air defenses. Syrian helicopters and planes could be grounded more simply with attacks on runways, depots and idle aircraft alone, carried out, if not by fighters, by cruise missiles and other standoff weaponry.

But even that may be too much for a president who has assured his country that the tide of war is receding. At this late date, supporting proxies may be the only reasonable option left. It's perversely self-vindicating. Wait long enough, and all other options disappear. As do red lines.

Neo-Neocon

Speechwriters as experts: it's all about the words

Several people have mentioned Ben Rhodes in connection with the Benghazi debacle (just Google "Ben Rhodes Benghazi" and you'll find plenty of the speculation). It's not at all clear how much responsibility Rhodes had for the decisions during the Benghazi attack and the spin afterward. But what *is* clear is that Rhodes is one of Obama's many advisors who lack anything remotely connected with expertise, except in the art of politics and speechwriting. Despite this, for Obama Rhodes doesn't just *write* about foreign policy, [he helps to make it](#).

Rhodes' resume [is singularly unimpressive](#), except after he was tapped by Obama to write for him and then to somehow be a foreign policy "expert." Rhodes is hardly unique in the Obama administration for having this sort of background. The president seems to prefer to have people around him with even less experience and expertise than he has, which is saying something.

Other presidents have been inexperienced, but they have made efforts to choose experienced and knowledgeable people to make up for their own shortcomings. Obama does not believe he has any shortcomings, and so he does the opposite. For the most part, his advisors tend to have several characteristics in common besides their lack of substantive knowledge about their new fields: (1) they are good with words; (2) they are young; (3) they are focused on politics; (4) they revere Obama.

[I've written before](#) about this phenomenon, but we keep being reminded of it, and so it bears repeating: Obama *prefers* to be surrounded by politically astute sycophants who are in way over their heads and don't realize it. That way he is less likely to be threatened or challenged.

So it occurs to me that maybe the simplest way to describe what happened in Benghazi is that, from start to finish, nearly everyone in charge and everyone who was a close and trusted advisor to those in charge was a political operative. Everyone. This of course includes Obama and Hillary Clinton, and all the supposed national security advisors such as Rhodes.

So they are a bunch of rank amateurs who literally have no idea what they were doing except in the political sense. And then when things went bad, they lied about it—using their words to try to get out of a jam, with the help of their friends in the MSM. It's worked for them in the past, and might well work again.

I think it's just as simple as that.

Power Line

David Gelernter: Who is on trial for Benghazi?

by Scott Johnson

David Gelernter is professor of computer science at Yale and the author, most recently, of [America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture \(and Ushered in the Obamacrats\)](#). He wrote ["Why do we live in America-Lite?"](#) for us, briefly summarizing the themes of the book.

Professor Gelernter returned to expand on the themes of his book in ["What keeps this failed president above water?"](#) and in ["Don't say we didn't warn you \(or dammit, wake up!\)."](#) Today he turns to the subject of Benghazi:

Obviously President Obama and Hillary Clinton are on trial—not before a court, but in the minds of thoughtful people everywhere. It appears (given the limited evidence we have so far) that they were grossly negligent before Benghazi, criminally incompetent that night of the attack, and then that they aided and abetted a conspiracy to lie about the murders—all for the obvious political reasons and because Obama and Clinton (and nearly all their leftist friends) believe that Americans are stone-stupid. But the real trial deals with other suspects.

It is the Democratic Party that's on trial today; and to a lesser extent, America's mainstream media. For Democrats (and especially Democratic senators) it is put-up-or-shut-up time: are they Democrats or Americans first? Obviously their first instinct was to defend the Democratic administration. Republicans would have done the same. But starting with the Hayes story on the Rice propaganda points (and the neo-Soviet process that turned them from truth to lies), and then the Issa hearing Wednesday (and a recent ABC news piece focusing again on the phoned-up talking points), no honest observer can fail to suspect this administration of doing unspeakable things. It is Congress's duty to find out the truth.

How would Republicans act if a GOP administration were under this sort of cloud? We know exactly how. It was the radically partisan Edward Kennedy who proposed that a senate select committee investigate Watergate—but in February 1973, the Senate voted *unanimously* to create that committee. Republican Senator Howard Baker was vice chairman, and asked the key question: "What did the president know and when did he know it?" Which Democratic senator will ask that question today, now that the issue isn't breaking-and-entering but lying about four murders, including the murder of an American ambassador? Which cabinet member will be Eliot Richardson and resign rather than continuing to be part of a coverup? Will John Kerry rise to the challenge?

Of course Watergate was a shot-in-the-arm for the American left, which has run US culture (run it into the ground) ever since the Cultural Revolution that turned the country upside down during the post-World War II generation. Will the bottomless arrogance and incompetence of the Obama administration—and the rising tide of Benghazi—energize American conservatives the same way? Probably. But today we are investigating four brutal murders that were intended precisely as an act of war against the United States; and the Democratic party is on trial for its life. The rest is small potatoes next to that.

Right Turn

[Benghazi: Hillary is in the middle of a thickening plot](#)

by Jenifer Rubin

As day follows night, the MSM yawns after hearing testimony Wednesday damaging both to the president and Democrats' other icon, Hillary Clinton. *No blockbusters. Just politics.* Well, that is just bunk.



Gregory Hicks, foreign service officer and former deputy chief of mission/charge d'affaires in Libya at the State Department.

To begin with, the very compelling witness Gregory Hicks explained to lawmakers that the YouTube video lampooning Muhammad was a non-event; rather, he understood the assault on the Benghazi consulate to be a terrorist attack and briefed Clinton that night. There was no confusion about the attack in that sense. The "spontaneous demonstration" story line did not come from people on the ground or from the intelligence community (who knew from the get-go that al-Qaeda linked operatives were involved). It came from senior administration officials.

Hicks, the State Department's deputy chief of mission in Libya, asked Beth Jones, the acting assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, why U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice was pinning the incident on the YouTube video. He said he was told not to ask questions.

Then there is the matter of the rescue forces. Among others, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta testified in February that no forces were called and none were told to stand down. The testimony yesterday tells us that isn't true. (That may have been a correct military judgment, but we'll never know.) The forces from Aviano Air Base in Italy and a second team of special forces in Tripoli were told to stand down, according to Hicks. He said the military personnel there were "furious. [A military officer told Hicks,] 'This is the first time in my career that a diplomat has more balls than somebody in the military.'" Mark Thompson, the State Department's deputy coordinator for counterterrorism, also testified, "I was told this was not the right time to deploy the team."

In the wake of the attack, Hicks testified, he was told not to speak with a congressional delegation visiting Libya. After he participated in a classified briefing without a State Department lawyer present, Cheryl Mills, Hillary Clinton's chief of staff and sometimes called Hillary's alter ego at State, contacted Gregory Hicks and told him she was "[very upset](#)."

Hicks also testified that the Libyan ambassador had told the State Department (confirmed in an e-mail from Jones on Sept. 12) that Ansar al-Sharia, affiliated with Islamic terrorists, conducted the attacks.

After all of this, Hicks was demoted to a desk job.

Unless you are employed by the administration or unwilling to compare yesterday's testimony to the multiple statements of administration officials up through the president's United Nations speech on Sept. 25, you have to conclude the administration departed from the set of facts it had available almost immediately.

[Eli Lake](#), who has broken one story after another, writes, "For 11 days after the 9/11 anniversary assault on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi, top Obama administration officials told the public that the assault stemmed from a protest of an anti-Muslim YouTube video. That was the public line from the White House in the closing weeks of a presidential election season, but it was not the view of several State Department officials at the time or the U.S. personnel on the ground in Libya." Nor does it match up with the e-mails and the multiple drafts of the talking points prepared in advance of Susan Rice's Sunday talk show appearances.

[Elliott Abrams](#), who served in both the Reagan and Bush 43 administrations, explains: "The [State Department's Accountability Review Board] protected all of the department's higher-ups and blamed career officials down the ladder. The board is now itself under investigation by State's inspector general, and Wednesday's testimony revealed the sore feelings of career officers about the review board's conduct." Moreover, it is also apparent who is enabling the effort of higher-ups to escape scrutiny:

No doubt politics motivated some of the Republicans, but due to the nature of the hearing they were cast as investigators. Most Democrats appeared far more dedicated to defending Mrs. Clinton and the Obama administration than to finding out exactly what happened, and any

criticism of Ms. Rice was rebutted. After all, Chris Stevens is gone but 2016 is just around the corner.

The three witnesses seemed to be visitors from a different reality—different from Rep. Carolyn Maloney and her outrage that anyone could criticize the great Secretary Clinton, or from Cheryl Mills and the anger she expressed at Mr. Hicks for allowing a congressman to escape the presence of the lawyer she had sent.

The Accountability Review Board was also part of that Washington culture, protecting the top levels of the State Department—the secretary and the deputy and under secretaries—and laying blame (and punishment) on the career people below them. This hearing did not ascertain where the buck should stop, but it was a step forward in getting the facts. And it was a reminder that in Washington we should not permit people with political motives to blight the careers of civil servants and blame them for failures of management and policy at the top.

Indeed, the greatest tragedy in this fiasco was the loss of four brave Americans, in part because this administration ignored and was unprepared for jihadist activity in Libya. But that gross error should not obscure lesser but still important missteps, most especially if they were deliberate efforts to cover up, shift blame and deny responsibility for the underlying tragedy. To claim that career diplomats or underlings in Foggy Bottom are lying or engaging in some misconduct is, well, lower than low. What's more, it just isn't true.

UPDATE: This is not to say Hillary Clinton's political career is not at issue. Of course, her conduct and testimony will be relevant to her future political career. If you had any doubt the new conservative opposition research group [America Rising](#) is out with [a video](#). Yes, it's very political, but then so was the response to Benghazi.

New Yorker **[Spinning Benghazi](#)** by Alex Koppelman

It's a cliché, of course, but it really is true: in Washington, every scandal has a crime and a coverup. The ongoing debate about the attack on the United States facility in Benghazi where four Americans were killed, and the Obama Administration's response to it, is no exception. For a long time, it seemed like the idea of a coverup was just a Republican obsession. But now there is something to it.

On Friday, ABC News's Jonathan Karl [revealed](#) the details of the editing process for the C.I.A.'s talking points about the attack, including the edits themselves and some of the reasons a State Department spokeswoman gave for requesting those edits. It's striking to see the [twelve different iterations](#) that the talking points went through before they were released to Congress and to United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice, who used them in Sunday show appearances that became a central focus of Republicans' criticism of the Administration's public response to the attacks. Over the course of about twenty-four hours, the remarks evolved from something specific and fairly detailed into a bland, vague mush.

From the very beginning of the editing process, the talking points contained the erroneous assertion that the attack was “spontaneously inspired by the protests at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and evolved.” That’s an important fact, because the right has always criticized the Administration based on the suggestion that the C.I.A. and the State Department, contrary to what they said, *knew* that the attack was not spontaneous and not an outgrowth of a demonstration. But everything else about the changes that were made is problematic. The initial draft revealed by Karl mentions “at least five other attacks against foreign interests in Benghazi” before the one in which four Americans were killed. That’s not in the final version. Nor is this: “[W]e do know that Islamic extremists with ties to al-Qa’ida participated in the attack.” That was replaced by the more tepid “There are indications that extremists participated in the violent demonstrations.” (Even if we accept the argument that State wanted to be *sure* that extremists were involved, and that they could be linked to Al Qaeda, before saying so with any level of certainty—which is reasonable and supported by evidence from Karl’s reporting—that doesn’t fully explain these changes away.)

Democrats will argue that the editing process wasn’t motivated by a desire to protect Obama’s record on fighting Al Qaeda in the run-up to the 2012 election. They have a point; based on what we’ve seen from Karl’s report, the process that went into creating and then changing the talking points seems to have been driven in large measure by two parts of the government—C.I.A. and State—trying to make sure the blame for the attacks and the failure to protect American personnel in Benghazi fell on the other guy.

But the mere existence of the edits—whatever the motivation for them—seriously undermines the White House’s credibility on this issue. This past November (after Election Day), White House Press Secretary Jay Carney told reporters that “The White House and the State Department have made clear that the single adjustment that was made to those talking points by either of those two institutions were changing the word ‘consulate’ to ‘diplomatic facility’ because ‘consulate’ was inaccurate.”

Remarkably, Carney is sticking with that line even now. In his regular press briefing on Friday afternoon (a briefing that was delayed several times, presumably in part so the White House could get its spin in order, but also so that it could hold a secretive pre-briefing briefing with select members of the White House press corps), he said:

The only edit made by the White House or the State Department to those talking points generated by the C.I.A. was a change from referring to the facility that was attacked in Benghazi from “consulate,” because it was not a consulate, to “diplomatic post”... it was a matter of non-substantive factual correction. But there was a process leading up to that that involved inputs from a lot of agencies, as is always the case in a situation like this and is always appropriate.

This is an incredible thing for Carney to be saying. He’s playing semantic games, telling a roomful of journalists that the definition of editing we’ve all been using is wrong, that the only thing that matters is who’s actually working the keyboard. It’s not quite re-defining the word “is,” or the phrase “sexual relations,” but it’s not all that far off, either.

WSJ - Political Diary

'Produce All Documents'

by Mary Kissel

Are the political winds starting to shift against labor secretary nominee Thomas Perez? Senate Republicans delayed a vote on his nomination Wednesday on a procedural technicality. The hearing is now expected to be held next week. But the more surprising news is that Rep. Elijah Cummings, a Maryland Democrat, called Wednesday for Mr. Perez to comply with a subpoena of his personal email account.

Until now, Democrats have denounced the House investigation into a legal quid pro quo that Mr. Perez negotiated with the City of St. Paul, Minn., last year, in his role as the Justice Department's civil-rights chief. As recently as Tuesday, Mr. Cummings asserted that the GOP investigation into Mr. Perez's activities was "intended to raise unfounded questions" about his reputation. White House spokesman Jay Carney said Wednesday that Republicans were "politicizing" the nomination.

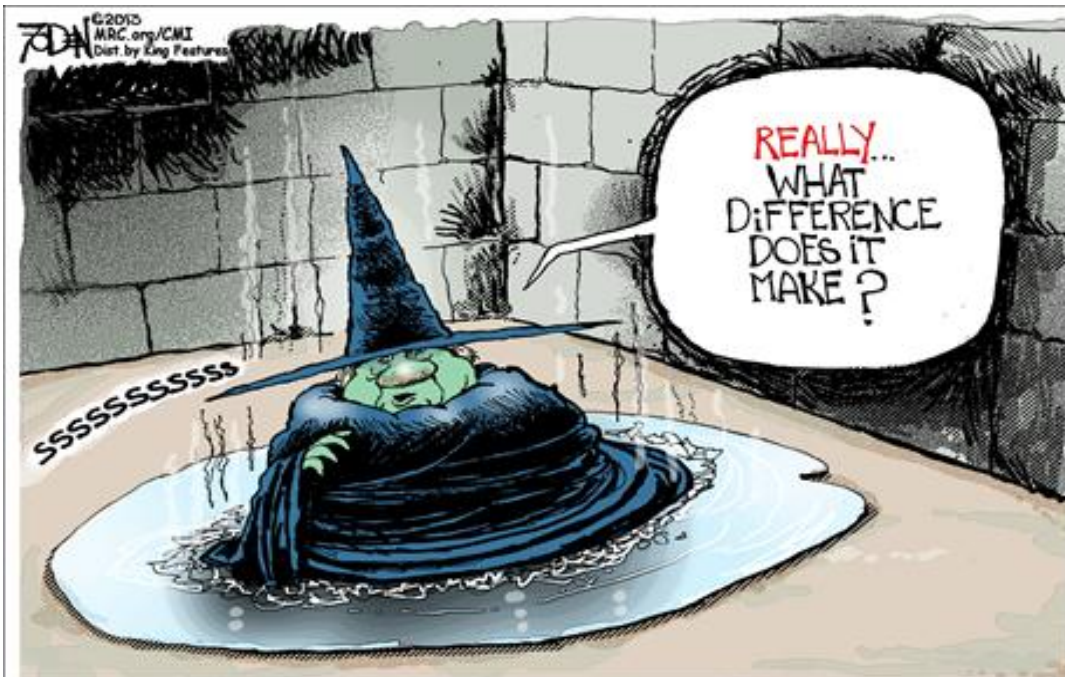
Well, no. Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Peter Kadzik, responding on Mr. Perez's behalf, has played cat and mouse with the House Oversight Committee since the subpoena was issued on April 10. He admitted that Mr. Perez used his personal email account for official business, in contravention of the Federal Records Act, but refused to turn over approximately 1,200 emails responsive to the subpoena. That's embarrassing for Democrats like Mr. Cummings, who has known Mr. Perez for more than a decade and has hailed his credentials for higher office.

Prominent Senate Republicans are starting to voice concerns too. On Wednesday, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell cited Mr. Perez's "willingness, time and again, to bend or ignore the law and to misstate the facts in order to advance his far-left ideology," a reference to how Mr. Perez's testimony to House investigators has been contradicted by documents and testimony from other witnesses. Texan John Cornyn weighed in with concerns about Mr. Perez's management capabilities. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, a rising star in the GOP, said he would "strongly oppose" the confirmation.

All of which adds to the pressure on Mr. Perez to comply with the subpoena and "produce all documents." If Mr. Perez gets cute and tries to dump the 1,200 emails the night before the Senate committee votes on his nomination, concerns will mount, and not just among Republicans.



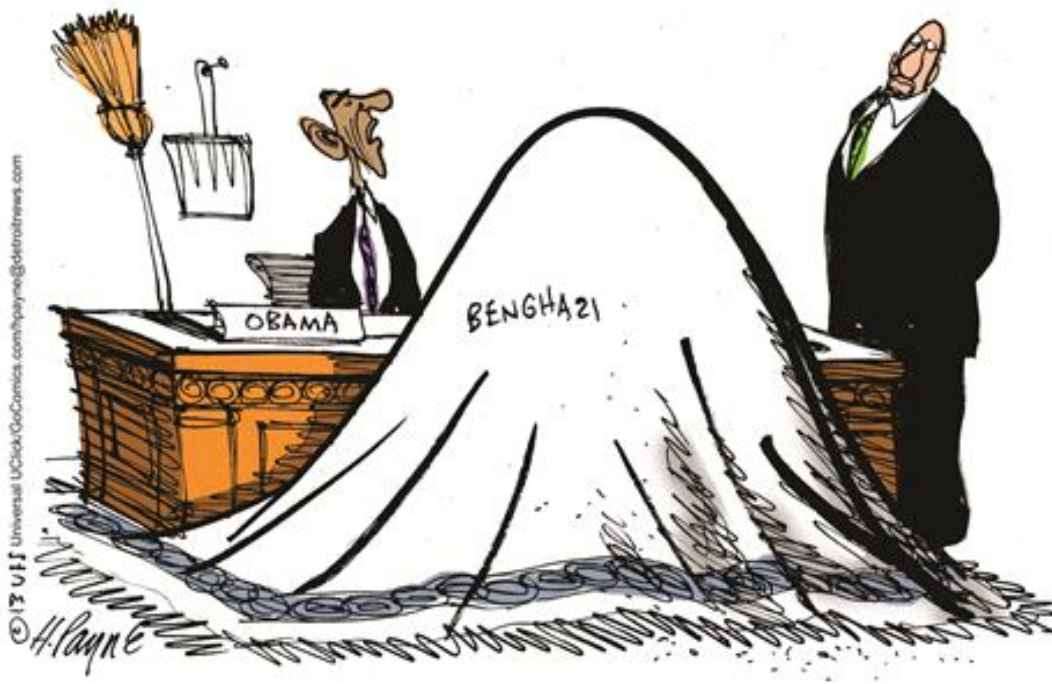
CLINTON PART II



THE WICKED WITCH HUNT OF THE BENGHAZI



HELP FROM HILLARY ARRIVES IN BENGHAZI



"WHAT COVER-UP?"



"So Gov. Chris Christie got his stomach stapled. So what's your point?"

