

## Conspiracy debunked: Intelligence community changed Benghazi talking points

BENGHAZI ATTACK | NOVEMBER 20, 2012 | BY: ROBERT BOWEN |



Senators McCain (left) and Graham hold a news conference about Benghazi but the conspiracy was debunked.

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For weeks now Congressional Republicans, Fox News, and CNN's [Erin Burnett](http://www.examiner.com/topic/erin-burnett) (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/erin-burnett>) have been obsessed with making a Watergate-sized scandal out of the [Benghazi attack](http://www.examiner.com/topic/benghazi-attack) (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/benghazi-attack>). They have suggested that President Obama is engaged in sinister cover-up of some yet-to-be-identified wrong doing surrounding the attack on our Mission in Benghazi on 9/11.

The conspiracy theory kicked into high gear Friday when former CIA Director [David Petraeus](http://www.examiner.com/topic/david-petraeus) (<http://www.examiner.com/topic/david-petraeus>) [told a closed door hearing of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees that a talking points memo had been altered by someone](http://www.examiner.com/article/after-petraeus-s-testimony-on-benghazi-will-there-be-another-witch-hunt) (<http://www.examiner.com/article/after-petraeus-s-testimony-on-benghazi-will-there-be-another-witch-hunt>), but he did not name the individual who did the altering. That was enough for the conspiracy theorists to kick their innuendos into high gear.

Despite the fact there is violent conflict raging between Israel and Gaza, and we are about to go over the fiscal cliff, the topic du jour in Washington is "who altered the talking points memo?" It reminds me of "who shot JR?"

The conspiracy theory took a direct hit Monday when [CNN reported that neither the White House nor the Justice Department changed the talking points](http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/19/official-changes-to-benghazi-talking-points-made-by-intel-community/) (<http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/19/official-changes-to-benghazi-talking-points-made-by-intel-community/>) on Benghazi.

"The intelligence community was responsible for the substantive changes made to the talking points distributed for government officials who spoke publicly about the attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi. The unclassified talking points on Libya, developed several days after the deadly attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, were not substantively changed by any agency outside of the intelligence community, according to the spokesman, Shawn Turner," CNN's Pam Benson wrote.

Talk about a buzz kill. With this revelation will they end their conspiracy quest or take it up another notch? It's too early to tell but for the first time in weeks, the Benghazi conspiracy was not one of the top five news stories on [CNN's OUTFRONT](http://outfront.blogs.cnn.com/) (<http://outfront.blogs.cnn.com/>).

CNN said the unclassified talking points were first developed by the CIA at the request of the House Intelligence Committee. Members wanted to know what they could say publicly about the Benghazi attack.

When the initial version was drafted it included information linking individuals involved in the attack to al Qaeda, according to a senior U.S. official familiar

with the drafting of the talking points. However, when the document was sent to the rest of the intelligence community for review, there was a decision to change "al Qaeda" to "extremists." The official said the change was made for legitimate intelligence and legal reasons, not for political purposes.

Turner elaborated. "First, the information about individuals linked to al Qaeda was derived from classified sources. Second, when links were so tenuous - as they still are - it makes sense to be cautious before pointing fingers so you don't set off a chain of circular and self-reinforcing assumptions. Third, it is important to be careful not to prejudice a criminal investigation in its early stages."

"The intelligence community made substantive, analytical changes before the talking points were sent to government agency partners for their feedback," Turner said, referring to the White House, Justice Department, State Department, Pentagon and FBI. "There were no substantive changes made to the talking points after they left the intelligence community," he said.

Republicans did not like the testimony because it should have put the conspiracy to rest. It seems they will keep on looking. Senators [John McCain and Lindsay Graham have called for a "Watergate scale" investigation](#) (<http://www.examiner.com/article/john-mccain-skips-libya-briefing-to-complain-to-press-about-lack-of-briefings>) costing tens of millions of dollars to find the conspirator(s) and bring him or them to justice. Fortunately, that notion has not caught on in Congress—yet.

We will see if Congress can focus on more important matters like the fiscal cliff rather than continual investigations of the Obama Administration none of which have found a gun let alone a smoking one.

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