

Benghazi committee grills Clinton for 11 hours, yields zero new facts

Written by The Conversation USA

Trey Gowdy's opening statements.

Since winning control of Congress in 2010, many House Republicans have specialized in political grandstanding. The hard work of legislating has never been their cup of tea.

But even by their hyper-partisan standards, House Republicans reached a new level of partisanship on Thursday. For 11 grueling hours, a House committee grilled Hillary Clinton about the 2012 terrorist attack on the State Department's facility in Benghazi, Libya. Although the committee droned on from dawn to dusk, the hearing did not produce a single substantive new fact about Benghazi.

The pointless nature of Thursday's hearing should come as no surprise. Almost two years ago, the Senate completed [a thorough investigation](#) into the deaths of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in the Benghazi attack. In January 2013, as part of the Senate's Benghazi investigation, [Clinton testified](#) before multiple Congressional committees.

There was absolutely no reason for Congress to investigate Benghazi yet again.

A partisan ambush

But fact-finding was never the goal of Thursday's hearing. As was immediately apparent from Congressman Trey Gowdy's opening statement attacking Clinton, the House committee's sole purpose was to sabotage Clinton's presidential campaign.

The House Republicans failed in that effort. They forgot the first rule of political ambushes: if you are going to use a Congressional investigation to harass and embarrass your opponents, you must present a façade of impartiality.

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But the Republicans could not muster the slightest pretense of objectivity. Before the hearings even began, Republican House Majority Leader [Kevin McCarthy](#) gave the game away when he bluntly told Fox News that the Benghazi committee was established to bring down Clinton's poll numbers.

The partisan tone that Chairman Gowdy exhibited throughout Thursday's hearing only confirmed McCarthy's point. Before Gowdy asked Clinton a single question, the chairman lambasted the Democrats on the committee for not meekly consenting to his fishing expedition.

Following Gowdy's lead, the other Republicans asked their questions in the form of accusations that Clinton heartlessly caused the American deaths in Benghazi. No objective observer could interpret the committee's questions as having any purpose other than to score crude political points.

Clinton learned from the past

Crucially, Clinton refused to take the committee's bait. She learned from her past mistakes. In the 2013 Senate hearing, she was [combative and defensive](#). On Thursday, she was patient, measured and relaxed. She avoided giving her opponents soundbites they could use against her in the 2016 presidential election.

Although they seem incapable of articulating it in a non-partisan fashion, the Republicans actually have one reasonable point to make about Benghazi: the State Department failed to adequately protect its outpost in Libya.

Outnumbered and outgunned in a Libyan city wracked by civil disorder, Ambassador Stevens and the men who died with him [never had a chance](#) when militants stormed the State Department facility. As secretary of state at the time of the attack, Clinton bears a share of responsibility for the security failures in Benghazi.

However, the Benghazi attack must ultimately be understood in a broader context. Tragic though the events in Libya were, the reality is there is inherent risk whenever Americans go overseas. A case in point is the 1983 terrorist attacks on the US Embassy and Marine barracks in [Beirut](#), Lebanon. The Beirut bombings [killed 268 Americans](#), a disaster on a far greater

scale than Benghazi.

But you won't hear about the lessons of Beirut from the Benghazi committee. The reason is that the Beirut attacks happened on the watch of [Ronald Reagan](#), a Republican president. Gowdy's committee has no interest in placing Benghazi in historical context because doing so would undermine the fiercely partisan story they want to tell.

Partisan extremism is the real threat

The truth is partisan extremism undermines American national security just as much as inadequate security measures at State Department facilities.

It should be clear by now that we will never learn from our past if we insist on viewing history through a partisan lens. If House Republicans were serious about investigating America's misjudgments in the Middle East, they would begin with an investigation of the Bush administration's woefully [inadequate planning](#) for the Iraq War. The Bush administration's profound lack of foresight contributed to the chaos and instability in Iraq that ultimately led to the deaths of 4,500 American troops and hundreds of [thousands of Iraqis](#).

But House Republicans have made clear that they are concerned only with partisan attacks. They have no interest in truly learning from America's mistakes.

When Paul Ryan becomes house speaker [next week](#), he would be wise to shut down Gowdy's committee. The toxic partisanship of House Republicans like Gowdy has distracted and divided the nation. It's time to close the book on the Benghazi investigation.

Disclosure

Anthony J Gaughan is a registered independent.

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