

Benghazi notes fail to satisfy Republicans

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THE White House release of about 100 pages of emails and notes about the deadly attack on the US diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, has failed to satisfy congressional Republicans, who are demanding more information about the issue that opposition Republicans in congress have used for months to attack the Obama administration.

The attack on September 11 last year killed US ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. Since then, critics have seized on the administration's initial public response to the terror attack, which at first was blamed on a protest over an anti-Islam video produced in the US.

One of the partially blacked-out emails released yesterday shows that then CIA director David Petraeus objected to the final talking points that UN ambassador Susan Rice used five days after the deadly assault because he wanted to see more detail publicly released, including a warning the CIA issued about plans for a break-in at the US embassy in Cairo.

The White House also released a single page of handwritten notes made by General Petraeus's deputy, Mike Morell, after a meeting at the White House the day before Ms Rice's appearance on television news shows to discuss the attack. On that page, Mr Morell scratched out from the CIA's early drafts of talking points mentions of al-Qa'ida, the experience of fighters in Libya, Islamic extremists and a warning to the Cairo embassy on the eve of the attacks of calls for a demonstration and break-in by jihadists.

"No mention of the cable to Cairo, either?" Mr Petraeus wrote after receiving Mr Morell's edited version, developed after an intense back-and-forth among Obama administration officials. "Frankly, I'd just as soon not use this, then."

A senior US intelligence official told reporters yesterday that Mr Morell made the changes to the talking points because of his concerns that they could prejudice an FBI investigation into who was responsible for the Benghazi attack.

The official said Mr Morell also didn't think it was fair to disclose the CIA's advance warning without giving the State Department a chance to explain how it responded.

Critics have highlighted an email by then State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland that expressed concern that any mention of prior warnings or the involvement of al-Qa'ida would give congressional Republicans ammunition to attack the administration in the weeks before the presidential election in November. That email was among those released by the White House.

An interim report last month from the Republicans on five house committees criticised the Obama administration and mentioned the emails, but the issue exploded last week when new details emerged that showed State Department and other administration officials pressing for references to terror groups and prior warnings be deleted, expressing concerns about the political implications.