

The Obama Legacy: Betrayal

It was difficult for me to read Bing West's latest Corner post, in which he broke down the White House's excuses offered for failing to even attempt to help the brave and embattled American *civilians* under fire in Benghazi. I can only imagine the fury of the soldiers and pilots who wanted to help, who were ready to help, and weren't allowed to even try—even when no one knew how long the battle would last.

There's a word for that: betrayal.

A good military improvises under fire. A good soldier *expects* to improvise. I know I keep going back to my Iraq experience—and I know that it was tactically very, very different—but the warrior ethos is the same, regardless of location. I distinctly recall a night in Diyala when all hell broke loose, when our little cav squadron was stretched to the absolute limit. Our howitzer battery, our cav troops, and our quick-reaction force were fully engaged in the fight, and then two suicide bombs went off in rapid succession in the middle of the closest city.

Dozens of civilians were dead, dozens more were wounded, and civil order was on the verge of breaking down. What did we do? We sent in our *cooks* to help restore order. Why? Because they were soldiers, because we had a mission, and because they were ready to go. They maintained their arms, their equipment, and themselves (to paraphrase the Soldier's Creed). So they rolled out of the gate, brought order to chaos, and helped treat the wounded. Oh, and the next morning they made sure we had a nice breakfast.

Secretary Gates's statement that intervention in Benghazi would have meant "send[ing] some small number of special forces or other troops in without knowing what the environment is, without knowing what the threat is, without having any

intelligence in terms of what is actually going on on the ground, would have been very dangerous” could well stand in for a mission brief regarding any number of missions downrange.

The failure to send what force we could to help Americans under fire is a scandal under any circumstances. First, if we had forces available and didn’t send them because the risk was deemed too great, someone needs to step up and own that decision. He (or she) needs to look the American people in the eye and explain why he left good men to die.

Second, if it really is the case that we could not have gotten an F-16 over Benghazi for “a day or two,” we similarly need an official to step up, look the American people in the eye, and explain why hundreds of billions of dollars can’t get jets capable of flying like this to be over Benghazi in a matter of hours.

Is our military leadership capable but unwilling or willing but not capable? Neither option is acceptable. Both options represent a betrayal of the warrior ethos.

The Obama administration betrayed brave Americans under fire. It betrayed its public trust when its IRS targeted American citizens simply because of their political views. And it betrayed even its friends in the press as it monitored AP reporters’ communications without their knowledge or consent.

If the second term is when a president cements his legacy, it seems to be cementing before our eyes.

David French is a senior counsel at the American Center for Law and Justice. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he is a former Senior Counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, and a past president of the Foundation of Individual Rights in Education.