

Statement for the Record
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House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing and Classified Briefing on the Defense Department's Posture for September 11,
2013: What are the Lessons of Benghazi?
September 19, 2013

Madam Chairman Roby, Ranking Member Tsongas, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

A year ago, U.S. Government facilities in North Africa and the Middle East came under attack. These attacks took place in a region that was being swept up by revolutions and widespread social upheaval. In Cairo and Tunis, protestors breached the grounds of our Embassies. In Sana'a and Khartoum, the protests escalated into attacks, which led to damage to our missions. Finally, as you know, a terrorist attack on our temporary mission facility in Benghazi, Libya, resulted in the tragic deaths of four Americans, including Ambassador Chris Stevens.

These events were dramatic examples of the threats and challenges our personnel overseas currently face. The pressure exerted by the United States and its partners has isolated the core of al-Qaeda. As the President has said, the remaining operatives in the al-Qaeda core spend more time thinking about their own safety than plotting against us. But we now confront a threat from diversified groups affiliated with al-Qaeda. The most well-known of these groups is al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which continues to plot against the United States. But increasingly, new groups of loosely affiliated extremists have emerged.

The upheaval in North Africa and the Middle East has contributed to a permissive environment for such extremist networks. Unlike the al-Qaeda core in Afghanistan and Pakistan, or even AQAP, these groups are most focused on the countries and regions where they are based. They work together through existing familial and tribal networks and focus on acting locally, as we saw in Benghazi and the BP oil facility in Algeria. And as we strive to work with our partners in the region, we see the political changes ushered in by the Arab Spring present challenges as well; although many of the governments in the region are friendly to our interests, they struggle to exert a monopoly of force within their own borders. So although host nations are bound by international law to protect our diplomatic personnel and facilities, we must recognize their capability shortfalls and work to offset them.

In this environment, the Department of Defense is working hard with our interagency partners to ensure our military resources are best positioned to protect U.S. personnel and facilities overseas.

The year since the attacks against our facility in Benghazi has been characterized by unprecedented cooperation between the Departments of State and Defense. From Secretaries Hagel and Kerry, down to the staffs on both sides of the river, we are in regular, open communication. The National Security Staff convenes weekly reviews of threat streams and security measures to identify hot spots, anticipate crises, and synchronize our proactive, preventative, and contingency response planning efforts. This improved interagency planning allows us to reinforce the efforts of host governments, which, under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, have the lead for overall protection of our diplomatic facilities.

This leads to a broader point: we believe a proactive approach is the best way to protect our staffs and facilities overseas, because once we are in a rescue situation, the chances of a positive outcome—for both our diplomatic personnel and the U.S. military forces attempting to rescue them—are already reduced. Our work over the last year has been to place an emphasis on acting *before* the crisis.

One of the most visible measures of security at a U.S. diplomatic post is the Marine Security Guard Detachment. We appreciate Congress' expansion of the Marine Security Guard – or MSG – program in the National Defense Authorization Act for 2013, which allowed us to move up to 1,000 Marines to the program. This increase in personnel will underpin a broader expansion of the program.

- We are raising the minimum size of existing MSG detachments at high-threat, high-risk posts from 7 to 13. Those increases have already begun, and will be complete next month.
- We are fielding 35 new detachments to posts that do not currently have them. Three of those detachments have already deployed, seven more will be in the field before the end of this year, and we aim to have the remainder fielded by the end of 2014.
- The Marine Corps has established the Marine Security Augmentation Unit in Quantico, Virginia, which will be able to provide MSGs on short notice at the request of Chiefs of Mission. These Marines are drawn from combat units, and have extra training in close-quarters battle, trauma, and weapons and tactics. Eight squads will be available by the end of the year, and we've already seen the benefit of this approach: at the request of the Department of State, extra MSGs from this security augmentation unit were sent to eight posts in anticipation of the September 11 anniversary last week.

As we've grown the MSG program, we've also enhanced their ability to protect U.S. citizens and facilities. For instance, in July, the Department of State and U.S. Marine Corps amended the mission of the MSGs to elevate the protection of people and facilities to be a co-equal priority with the protection of classified information. Just a few weeks ago, the Department of State also approved the use of additional less-than-lethal weapons such as tear gas

for MSGs. Both of these changes, when combined with the expansion of the program, reduce risk to our citizens and facilities where MSGs are deployed.

At some posts, we need a higher level of security. At many high-risk posts, the Department of State is hardening its facilities or is increasing the numbers of security personnel at the post. The Department of State is using lessons learned to improve physical security at our facilities and assess the best methods of providing that security for the Department to conduct U.S. foreign policy objectives. Facility security is focused on delaying mobs and small group attacks with a tiered defense of physical barriers and protection against bomb-laden vehicles with perimeter anti-ram barriers, compound access controls, and setback distance

In places where the threat is high, the host nation's capacity is low, or our facility is vulnerable, DoD can be a "bridging solution by either providing temporary forces at posts, or by enhancing the posture of nearby response forces and assets, until those risks are brought down to a manageable level by more permanent solutions. Security augmentation forces provide the Ambassador with a more robust security capability, and we know the presence of a larger force can be a deterrent to those considering an attack against the facility. We can discuss how we've done this at specific posts in the closed session.

In those countries where we have willing but less capable host nation security forces, the Administration is investing in building the capacity of host nation forces, who are required under international law to be our first line of defense. Although we understand that we cannot be solely dependent on our partners for our security, we must encourage and, where appropriate, help host nations to live up to their responsibilities. Through the use of available authorities such as Section 1206 and the Global Security Contingency Fund, we will continue to build the capacity of partner forces in the Middle East and North Africa. These and other efforts that allow direct military-to-military engagement provide an opportunity to improve their overall ability to respond to threats against our shared interests, as well as build relationships with their security forces that can be invaluable in a crisis.

Lastly, as Major General Roberson will explain in greater detail during the closed session, I want to underscore that we are more ready than ever to respond to a crisis or attack if one occurs without warning. In addition to realigning our forces around the globe, we have made joint planning between the Combatant Commands and Chiefs of Mission at high-threat, high-risk posts a priority task. As a consequence of these efforts, the Combatant Commands now have a better understanding of the threats and expectations at diplomatic posts. In turn, Chiefs of Mission at high-risk posts now have our best estimate of response times to inform their decisions about adjustments to staff presence in times of increased security threat.

The President has made clear that we must mitigate risks to our personnel and facilities with preventive, proactive security steps and contingency response plans. Although we cannot eliminate the risk completely in all cases, I believe we've made significant progress over the last

year toward getting that the right balance between our needs to deploy personnel into dangerous areas around the world to advance U.S. security interests and the risks to U.S. personnel and facilities. We are taking prudent steps to reduce the vulnerability of people and facilities abroad while not turning our embassies into fortresses and degrading our diplomats' ability to do the critical work that benefits us all.

Madam Chairman, I thank you again for the invitation to be before you and discuss these important subjects. I am happy to respond to any questions you or the Members of the Subcommittee may have.