

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LEON E. PANETTA
STATEMENT ON THE ATTACKS ON U.S. FACILITIES IN BENGHAZI, LIBYA
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2013**

Chairman Levin and Senator Inhofe, members of the committee: I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the terrorist attacks on our facilities in Benghazi on September 11, 2012.

On that tragic day, as always, the Department of Defense was prepared for a wide range of contingencies, but unfortunately there were no specific indications of an imminent attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi. Without adequate warning, there was not enough time given the speed of the attack for armed military assets to respond. In the months since the tragedy at the Temporary Mission Facility and nearby Annex in Benghazi, we've learned these were actually two short duration attacks that occurred some six hours apart. This was not a prolonged assault which could have been brought to an end by a U.S. military response. Despite the uncertainty at the time, however, the Department of Defense and the rest of the United States government spared no effort to save American lives.

The four Americans who perished in Benghazi – Ambassador Chris Stevens, Information Management Officer Sean Smith, and security personnel Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty – were heroes and patriots. I had the opportunity to join President Obama, Secretary Clinton and other U.S. officials at Andrews Air Force Base for the dignified transfer ceremony where the bodies of these heroes were returned home. I also had the opportunity to meet with the families of the fallen. We have a solemn responsibility to these families, and to all diplomatic personnel who put themselves at risk, to find out exactly what happened, to bring those involved to justice, and to make sure we are doing everything possible to ensure the safety of our personnel and facilities worldwide.

To that end, the Department of Defense has fully supported efforts by Congress and the State Department to review the events and decisions surrounding the attacks in Benghazi. We have made every effort to respond promptly to numerous requests for additional information, briefings, and testimony from members and committees in Congress. In fact, General Dempsey and I were among the first U.S. government senior officials to brief Congress on this tragedy when we appeared before this committee on September 14, 2012, three days after the attacks.

Additionally, the Defense Department participated in classified hearing and answered questions before the Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, and Homeland Security oversight Committees. We also provided all requested support to the Accountability Review Board, the independent investigative panel co-chaired by Ambassador Pickering and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen.

Based on the information we've compiled and the reviews we have conducted, let me describe for you DoD's response to the events of September 11th, some of the lessons learned, and the adjustments we are making to our global force posture given continuing unrest throughout North Africa and the Middle East. In fact, the changes we've made have already resulted in early decisions to deploy additional security, or decisions by the State Department to withdraw diplomatic staff in advance of a crisis.

DoD's Response on September 11, 2012

While DoD does not have primary responsibility for the security of U.S. diplomatic facilities around the world, we work closely with the State Department and support them as requested. In the months prior to the Benghazi attack, we had received several hundred reports on possible threats to American facilities around the world. Over the course of the day on September 11, General Dempsey and I received a number of reports of possible threats to U.S. facilities – including those in Egypt – but there were no reports of imminent threats to U.S. personnel or facilities in Benghazi.

By our best estimate, the incident at the Temporary Mission Facility in Benghazi began at 3:42 p.m. eastern daylight time on September 11th. The Embassy in Tripoli was notified of the attacks almost immediately and within 17 minutes of the initial reports – at 3:59 p.m. – AFRICOM directed that an unarmed, unmanned, surveillance aircraft that was nearby to reposition overhead the Benghazi facility.

Soon after the initial reports about the attack on Benghazi, General Dempsey and I met with President Obama and he ordered all available DoD assets to respond to the attack in Libya and to protect U.S. personnel and interests in the region. It is important to remember that in addition to responding to the situation in Benghazi, we were also concerned about potential threats to U.S. personnel in Tunis, Tripoli, Cairo, Sana'a, and elsewhere that could potentially require a military response.

In consultation with Chairman Dempsey and AFRICOM Commander General Ham, I directed several specific actions:

- A Marine Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST) platoon, stationed in Spain to prepare to deploy to Benghazi;
- A Second FAST platoon to prepare to deploy to the Embassy in Tripoli;
- A special operations force, which was training in Central Europe, to prepare to deploy to an intermediate staging base in Southern Europe; and
- A special operations force based in the United States to deploy to an intermediate staging base in Southern Europe.

Some have asked why other types of armed aircraft were not dispatched to Benghazi. The reason is because armed UAVs, AC-130 gunships, or fixed-wing fighters with the associated tanking, armaments, targeting and support capabilities were not in the vicinity of Libya and because of the distance, would have taken at least 9 to 12 hours if not more to deploy. This was, pure and simple, a problem of distance and time.

The quickest response option available was the Tripoli-based security team. Within hours, this six-person team, including two U.S. military personnel, chartered a private airplane and deployed to Benghazi. Within 15 minutes of arriving at the Annex facility, they came under attack by mortar and rocket propelled grenades. Members of this team, along with others at the Annex facility, provided emergency medical assistance and supported the evacuation of all personnel. Only 12 hours after the attacks began, all remaining U.S. government personnel had been safely evacuated from Benghazi.

Looking back, our actions in the immediate aftermath of these attacks have been subject to intense scrutiny and review. Let me share with you the conclusion that the Accountability Review Board reached:

The interagency response was timely and appropriate, but there simply was not enough time given the speed of the attacks for armed U.S. military assets

to have made a difference. Senior-level interagency discussions were underway soon after Washington received initial word of the attacks and continued through the night. The Board found no evidence of any undue delays in decision making or denial of support from Washington or from the military combatant commanders. Quite the contrary: the safe evacuation of all U.S. government personnel from Benghazi twelve hours after the initial attack and subsequently to Ramstein Air Force Base was the result of exceptional U.S. government coordination and military response and helped save the lives of two severely wounded Americans.

Lessons Learned

Still, it is clear that there are lessons to be learned and steps that must be taken to ensure we are doing everything possible to protect our personnel and facilities abroad. In concert with the State Department and the Intelligence Community, we are in the process of developing enhanced security for U.S. persons and facilities in the wake of Benghazi. There will always be a tension between mission-effectiveness for personnel and their physical security. We are committed to steps that avoid a bunker mentality and yet still afford greater protection from armed attack. We are taking steps along three tracks.

1. Host Nation Capacity

First, we have to be able to better assess and build up the capabilities of host governments to provide security for U.S. personnel and facilities. The fact is that our embassies and consulates depend on host country personnel to provide security, and this episode raises concerns about the ability of newly established or fragile governments to properly secure U.S. diplomatic facilities.

To address these concerns, we are now considering how the Department of Defense can better help host-nations enhance the security provided to our diplomatic facilities. Where permissible and appropriate, and in collaboration with the Secretary of State and the U.S. Chief of Mission in the affected country, we believe that the Defense Department can assist in the development of host-nation forces using a range of security assistance authorities to train and equip these forces.

2. Enhanced Diplomatic Security

Second, we are supporting the State Department's efforts to look at hardening facilities and re-assessing diplomatic security. To determine what changes may be required, we assisted the State Department in deployment of Interagency Security Assessment Teams to evaluate the security level at 19 vulnerable diplomatic facilities, including our embassy in Libya, and we are in the process of developing recommendations on potential security increases required.

As part of this review, we have also considered how the role, mission, and resourcing of the Marine Security Guards could be adapted to respond to this new threat environment. In the near term, we have agreed with the Department of State to add 35 new Marine Security Guard detachments over the next two to three years, in addition to the 152 detachments in place today. We're working with State now to identify specific locations for the new detachments. We will identify any necessary resource and force structure adjustments to support this initiative.

Although there was not a Marine Security Guard detachment posted to the Benghazi Temporary Mission Facility, based on our review of all Embassy security incidents that occurred

in September 2012, in Tunis, Cairo, Khartoum, and Sana'a, we have initiated coordination with the Department of State to expand the Marines' role beyond their primary mission to protect classified information. This could include expanded use of non-lethal weapons, and additional training and equipment, to support the Embassy Regional Security Officer's response options when host nation security force capabilities are at risk of being overwhelmed.

3. Enhanced Intelligence and Military Response Capacity

Third, we are focused on enhancing intelligence collection and ensuring that our forces throughout the region are prepared to respond to crisis, if necessary.

The United States military is not and should not be a global 9-1-1 service capable of arriving on the scene within minutes to every possible contingency around the world. We have forces on alert and prepared to move, but our ability to identify threats, adjust posture, prevent plots and respond to attacks to our personnel at home and overseas depends on actionable intelligence.

Therefore, we are working with the State Department and the Intelligence Community to ensure our collection and analysis is linked with military posture and planning. We are working to enhance our intelligence collection, improve the responsiveness of contingency assets, and adjust the location of in-extremis reaction forces. At the same time, we're working closely with State to ensure they have our best estimate of response times for each at-risk diplomatic facility, so that they can make the best informed decisions about adjustments to their staff presence in areas of increased security threat.

An Adequate Response Demands Adequate Resources

I firmly believe that the Department of Defense and the U.S. Armed Forces did all that we could do in response to the attacks in Benghazi. We employed every asset at our disposal that could have helped save the lives of our American colleagues. We will support efforts to bring those responsible to justice.

Going forward, we intend to adapt to the security environment to ensure we are better positioned and prepared to support the Department of State in securing our facilities around the world. But in order to be able to effectively protect the American people and our interests abroad at a time of instability we must have an agile and ready force, and above all, we must end the cloud of budget uncertainty that is hanging over the Department and the entire U.S. government.

That brings me to my greatest concern right now as Secretary, and frankly the greatest security risk we are facing as a nation, which is the budget uncertainty which could prompt the most significant military readiness crisis in more than a decade.

Right now, the Department of Defense faces the prospect of sequestration beginning March 1st. If Congress fails to act and sequestration is triggered, and if we also must operate under a year-long continuing resolution, we would be faced with a significant shortfall in operating funds for our active forces with only seven months remaining in the fiscal year. This will damage our national defense and compromise our ability to respond to crises in a dangerous world.

The responsibility of dealing with this crisis rests with the leadership of the nation. I know that the members of this committee share the deep concerns I have raised about sequestration, and I urge you to do the responsible thing and avoid weakening our national defense. The State Department and Intelligence community also must be provided with the

resources they need to execute the mission we expect of them – including the enhancements I’ve described today.

Whatever steps are required to be taken to properly posture U.S. forces for possible emergency response operations would be seriously impacted by the readiness crisis caused by uncertainty or dramatically reduced resources. The responsibility to protect our citizens rests with both the Administration and the Congress.

Thank you.

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