

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA
CHAIRMAN
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
BENNGHAZI
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Chairman Levin, Senator Inhofe, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting us to address the attacks in Benghazi on 11 September 2012. As Secretary Panetta stated, we have fully supported every effort and every request to understand and learn from this tragic event.

Allow me to begin by publically honoring the service of our State Department colleagues. The men and women of our nation's diplomatic corps are selfless and courageous. They do hard things in hard places. I have stood side-by-side with them in Iraq and in Afghanistan where their words are America's vision, where their deeds are America's reputation, and where their outstretched hand is America's promise.

In Benghazi, we lost four fellow servants of the nation—Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty. To their family and friends, I offer my personal condolences. They were among the very best our nation has to offer the world. They acted bravely for our Nation and for the Libyan people. We mourn their deaths even as we honor their service.

We honor them most by taking what we learn from their loss to prepare for an uncertain future. We must keep working together—as we are doing here today—to adapt our missions and our forces in order to advance America's national interests. Our own security depends on our ability to build relationships even under the most challenging of conditions.

The conditions in Libya and all of North Africa were then and remain highly dynamic. The balance of influence is shifting. The social contract between the governed and the government is being negotiated in the streets. Mobile technology and social media have helped to accelerate the pace of change. Weaker security institutions are facing more empowered non-state actors. Included in this combustible mix are terrorists seeking to capitalize on the chaos.

Although today we are focused on Benghazi, we must not forget that it was 9-11 everywhere. On that day, we were postured to respond to a wide array of general threats around the globe. We positioned our forces in a way that was informed by and consistent with available threat estimates. In fact, US facilities in many countries throughout the Africa Command and Central Command areas were operating under heightened force protection levels.

As events unfolded, we assessed the situation based on the available intelligence. We considered the risk to US government personnel as protests broke out across the region. General Carter Ham's sound judgment proved critical as we analyzed the complex, rapidly evolving situation and our range of response options.

Our military was appropriately responsive. We acted quickly once notified of the attacks on the Temporary Mission Facility. As a result of our posture and our ongoing operations, we were able to divert an unarmed, unmanned reconnaissance aircraft to Benghazi within minutes. It arrived on the scene approximately an hour later.

We also repositioned forces based on direction from the President of the United States and Secretary of Defense. We deployed a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team to Tripoli while a second team prepared to deploy. We directed the deployment of a special operations force in the United States and one already in Europe to intermediate staging bases. We also provided C-17 airlift for medical evacuation. We did what our posture and capabilities allowed.

This does not mean we accept the status quo as sufficient for this new security environment. We have worked closely with the State Department over the last several months to help improve the security of our diplomatic missions. Our work has been informed by the recommendations of the Accountability Review

Board for Benghazi. I commend Ambassador Tom Pickering and my predecessor Admiral Mike Mullen for their valuable work.

Specifically, the military has deployed some of our best security experts alongside State Department personnel to reassess the threat to many high-risk diplomatic posts. We anticipate that this will result in a request to increase our presence at the most vulnerable posts. We are looking at how to resource a request for 35 Marine Security Guard detachments at new locations. We have also adjusted the alert posture of security augmentation forces in the most volatile areas. But, we are not done adapting to the emergent security landscape. We will continue to work with the State Department and the Congress to examine additional, proactive options for improving security.

In closing, I offer my sincere thanks to this committee for your dedication to keeping our military strong. I share your commitment to supporting those who serve in both a military and diplomatic capacity to keep America immune from coercion.