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*“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”  
-- George Santayana, Reason in Common Sense (1905)*

### INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Title III of the Omnibus Diplomatic and Antiterrorism Act of 1986, 22 U.S.C. § 4831 *et seq.*, (the “Act”), Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton convened an Accountability Review Board (ARB) for Benghazi to examine the facts and circumstances surrounding the September 11-12, 2012, killings of four U.S. government personnel, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, John Christopher Stevens, in Benghazi, Libya. A series of attacks on September 11-12, 2012 involving arson, small-arms and machine-gun fire, and use of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), grenades and mortars, focused on two U.S. facilities in Benghazi, as well as U.S. personnel en route between the two facilities. In addition, the attacks severely wounded two U.S. personnel, injured three Libyan contract guards and resulted in the destruction and abandonment of both facilities – the U.S. Special Mission compound (SMC) and Annex.

Four Board members were selected by the Secretary of State and one member from the intelligence community (IC) was selected by the Director for National Intelligence. Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering served as Chairman, with Admiral Michael Mullen as Vice Chairman. Additional members were Catherine Bertini, Richard Shinnick, and Hugh Turner, who represented the IC.

The criminal investigation of the September 11-12, 2012, Benghazi attacks, for which the statutory responsibility rests with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), was still underway at the time of this report. The Board enjoyed excellent cooperation with the Department of Justice and FBI throughout preparation of this report. The key questions surrounding the identity, actions and motivations of the perpetrators remain to be determined by the ongoing criminal investigation.

As called for by the Act, this report examines: whether the attacks were security related; whether security systems and procedures were adequate and implemented properly; the impact of intelligence and information availability; whether any other facts or circumstances in these cases may be relevant to appropriate security management of U.S. missions worldwide; and, finally, whether any U.S. government employee or contractor, as defined by the Act, breached her or his duty.

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The Benghazi attacks represented the first murder of a U.S. ambassador since 1988, and took place 11 years to the day after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Ambassador Stevens personified the U.S. commitment to a free and democratic Libya. His knowledge of Arabic, his ability to move in all sectors of the population, and his wide circle of friends, particularly in Benghazi, marked him as an exceptional practitioner of modern diplomacy. The U.S. Special Mission in Benghazi, established in November 2011, was the successor to his highly successful endeavor as Special Envoy to the rebel-led government that eventually toppled Muammar Qaddafi in fall 2011. The Special Mission bolstered U.S. support for Libya's democratic transition through engagement with eastern Libya, the birthplace of the revolt against Qaddafi and a regional power center.

The Benghazi attacks took place against a backdrop of significantly increased demands on U.S. diplomats to be present in the world's most dangerous places to advance American interests and connect with populations beyond capitals, and beyond host governments' reach. With State Department civilians at the forefront of U.S. efforts to stabilize and build capacity in Iraq, as the U.S. military draws down in Afghanistan, and with security threats growing in volatile environments where the U.S. military is not present – from Peshawar to Bamako – the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) is being stretched to the limit as never before. DS overall has done a fine job protecting thousands of employees in some 273 U.S. diplomatic missions around the world. No diplomatic presence is without risk, given past attempts by terrorists to pursue U.S. targets worldwide. And the total elimination of risk is a non-starter for U.S. diplomacy, given the need for the U.S. government to be present in places where stability and security are often most profoundly lacking and host government support is sometimes minimal to non-existent.

The Benghazi attacks also took place in a context in which the global terrorism threat as most often represented by al Qaeda (AQ) is fragmenting and increasingly devolving to local affiliates and other actors who share many of AQ's aims, including violent anti-Americanism, without necessarily being organized or operated under direct AQ command and control. This growing, diffuse range of terrorist and hostile actors poses an additional challenge to American security officers, diplomats, development professionals and decision-makers seeking to mitigate risk and remain active in high threat environments without resorting to an unacceptable total fortress and stay-at-home approach to U.S. diplomacy.

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For many years the State Department has been engaged in a struggle to obtain the resources necessary to carry out its work, with varying degrees of success. This has brought about a deep sense of the importance of husbanding resources to meet the highest priorities, laudable in the extreme in any government department. But it has also had the effect of conditioning a few State Department managers to favor restricting the use of resources as a general orientation. There is no easy way to cut through this Gordian knot, all the more so as budgetary austerity looms large ahead. At the same time, it is imperative for the State Department to be mission-driven, rather than resource-constrained – particularly when being present in increasingly risky areas of the world is integral to U.S. national security. The recommendations in this report attempt to grapple with these issues and err on the side of increased attention to prioritization and to fuller support for people and facilities engaged in working in high risk, high threat areas. The solution requires a more serious and sustained commitment from Congress to support State Department needs, which, in total, constitute a small percentage both of the full national budget and that spent for national security. One overall conclusion in this report is that Congress must do its part to meet this challenge and provide necessary resources to the State Department to address security risks and meet mission imperatives.

Mindful of these considerations, the ARB has examined the terrorist attacks in Benghazi with an eye towards how we can better advance American interests and protect our personnel in an increasingly complex and dangerous world. This Board presents its findings and recommendations with the unanimous conclusion that while the United States cannot retreat in the face of such challenges, we must work more rigorously and adeptly to address them, and that American diplomats and security professionals, like their military colleagues, serve the nation in an inherently risky profession. Risk mitigation involves two imperatives – engagement and security – which require wise leadership, good intelligence and evaluation, proper defense and strong preparedness and, at times, downsizing, indirect access and even withdrawal. There is no one paradigm. Experienced leadership, close coordination and agility, timely informed decision making, and adequate funding and personnel resources are essential. The selfless courage of the four Americans who died in the line of duty in Benghazi on September 11-12, 2012, as well as those who were injured and all those who valiantly fought to save their colleagues, inspires all of us as we seek to draw the right lessons from that tragic night.

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## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

A series of terrorist attacks in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11-12, 2012, resulted in the deaths of four U.S. government personnel, Ambassador Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty; seriously wounded two other U.S. personnel and injured three Libyan contract guards; and resulted in the destruction and abandonment of the U.S. Special Mission compound and Annex.

## FINDINGS

In examining the circumstances of these attacks, the Accountability Review Board for Benghazi determined that:

1. The attacks were security related, involving arson, small arms and machine gun fire, and the use of RPGs, grenades, and mortars against U.S. personnel at two separate facilities – the SMC and the Annex – and en route between them. Responsibility for the tragic loss of life, injuries, and damage to U.S. facilities and property rests solely and completely with the terrorists who perpetrated the attacks. The Board concluded that there was no protest prior to the attacks, which were unanticipated in their scale and intensity.
2. Systemic failures and leadership and management deficiencies at senior levels within two bureaus of the State Department (the “Department”) resulted in a Special Mission security posture that was inadequate for Benghazi and grossly inadequate to deal with the attack that took place.

Security in Benghazi was not recognized and implemented as a “shared responsibility” by the bureaus in Washington charged with supporting the post, resulting in stove-piped discussions and decisions on policy and security. That said, Embassy Tripoli did not demonstrate strong and sustained advocacy with Washington for increased security for Special Mission Benghazi.

The short-term, transitory nature of Special Mission Benghazi’s staffing, with talented and committed, but relatively inexperienced, American personnel often on temporary assignments of 40 days or less, resulted in diminished institutional knowledge, continuity, and mission capacity.

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Overall, the number of Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) security staff in Benghazi on the day of the attack and in the months and weeks leading up to it was inadequate, despite repeated requests from Special Mission Benghazi and Embassy Tripoli for additional staffing. Board members found a pervasive realization among personnel who served in Benghazi that the Special Mission was not a high priority for Washington when it came to security-related requests, especially those relating to staffing.

The insufficient Special Mission security platform was at variance with the appropriate Overseas Security Policy Board (OSPB) standards with respect to perimeter and interior security. Benghazi was also severely under-resourced with regard to certain needed security equipment, although DS funded and installed in 2012 a number of physical security upgrades. These included heightening the outer perimeter wall, safety grills on safe area egress windows, concrete jersey barriers, manual drop-arm vehicle barriers, a steel gate for the Villa C safe area, some locally manufactured steel doors, sandbag fortifications, security cameras, some additional security lighting, guard booths, and an Internal Defense Notification System.

Special Mission Benghazi's uncertain future after 2012 and its "non-status" as a temporary, residential facility made allocation of resources for security and personnel more difficult, and left responsibility to meet security standards to the working-level in the field, with very limited resources.

In the weeks and months leading up to the attacks, the response from post, Embassy Tripoli, and Washington to a deteriorating security situation was inadequate. At the same time, the SMC's dependence on the armed but poorly skilled Libyan February 17 Martyrs' Brigade (February 17) militia members and unarmed, locally contracted Blue Mountain Libya (BML) guards for security support was misplaced.

Although the February 17 militia had proven effective in responding to improvised explosive device (IED) attacks on the Special Mission in April and June 2012, there were some troubling indicators of its reliability in the months and weeks preceding the September attacks. At the time of Ambassador Stevens' visit, February 17 militia members had stopped accompanying Special Mission vehicle movements in protest over salary and working hours.

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Post and the Department were well aware of the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks but at no time were there ever any specific, credible threats against the mission in Benghazi related to the September 11 anniversary. Ambassador Stevens and Benghazi-based DS agents had taken the anniversary into account and decided to hold all meetings on-compound on September 11.

The Board found that Ambassador Stevens made the decision to travel to Benghazi independently of Washington, per standard practice. Timing for his trip was driven in part by commitments in Tripoli, as well as a staffing gap between principal officers in Benghazi. Plans for the Ambassador's trip provided for minimal close protection security support and were not shared thoroughly with the Embassy's country team, who were not fully aware of planned movements off compound. The Ambassador did not see a direct threat of an attack of this nature and scale on the U.S. Mission in the overall negative trendline of security incidents from spring to summer 2012. His status as the leading U.S. government advocate on Libya policy, and his expertise on Benghazi in particular, caused Washington to give unusual deference to his judgments.

Communication, cooperation, and coordination among Washington, Tripoli, and Benghazi functioned collegially at the working-level but were constrained by a lack of transparency, responsiveness, and leadership at the senior levels. Among various Department bureaus and personnel in the field, there appeared to be very real confusion over who, ultimately, was responsible and empowered to make decisions based on both policy and security considerations.

3. Notwithstanding the proper implementation of security systems and procedures and remarkable heroism shown by American personnel, those systems and the Libyan response fell short in the face of a series of attacks that began with the sudden penetration of the Special Mission compound by dozens of armed attackers.

The Board found the responses by both the BML guards and February 17 to be inadequate. The Board's inquiry found little evidence that the armed February 17 guards offered any meaningful defense of the SMC, or succeeded in summoning a February 17 militia presence to assist expeditiously.

The Board found the Libyan government's response to be profoundly lacking on the night of the attacks, reflecting both weak capacity and near absence of

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central government influence and control in Benghazi. The Libyan government did facilitate assistance from a quasi-governmental militia that supported the evacuation of U.S. government personnel to Benghazi airport. The Libyan government also provided a military C-130 aircraft which was used to evacuate remaining U.S. personnel and the bodies of the deceased from Benghazi to Tripoli on September 12.

The Board determined that U.S. personnel on the ground in Benghazi performed with courage and readiness to risk their lives to protect their colleagues, in a near impossible situation. The Board members believe every possible effort was made to rescue and recover Ambassador Stevens and Sean Smith.

The interagency response was timely and appropriate, but there simply was not enough time for armed U.S. military assets to have made a difference.

4. The Board found that intelligence provided no immediate, specific tactical warning of the September 11 attacks. Known gaps existed in the intelligence community's understanding of extremist militias in Libya and the potential threat they posed to U.S. interests, although some threats were known to exist.
5. The Board found that certain senior State Department officials within two bureaus demonstrated a lack of proactive leadership and management ability in their responses to security concerns posed by Special Mission Benghazi, given the deteriorating threat environment and the lack of reliable host government protection. However, the Board did not find reasonable cause to determine that any individual U.S. government employee breached his or her duty.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

With the lessons of the past and the challenges of the future in mind, the Board puts forward recommendations in six core areas: Overarching Security Considerations; Staffing High Risk, High Threat Posts; Training and Awareness; Security and Fire Safety Equipment; Intelligence and Threat Analysis; and Personnel Accountability.

OVERARCHING SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

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1. The Department must strengthen security for personnel and platforms beyond traditional reliance on host government security support in high risk, high threat<sup>1</sup> posts. The Department should urgently review the proper balance between acceptable risk and expected outcomes in high risk, high threat areas. While the answer cannot be to refrain from operating in such environments, the Department must do so on the basis of having: 1) a defined, attainable, and prioritized mission; 2) a clear-eyed assessment of the risk and costs involved; 3) a commitment of sufficient resources to mitigate these costs and risks; 4) an explicit acceptance of those costs and risks that cannot be mitigated; and 5) constant attention to changes in the situation, including when to leave and perform the mission from a distance. The United States must be self-reliant and enterprising in developing alternate security platforms, profiles, and staffing footprints to address such realities. Assessments must be made on a case-by-case basis and repeated as circumstances change.
2. The Board recommends that the Department re-examine DS organization and management, with a particular emphasis on span of control for security policy planning for all overseas U.S. diplomatic facilities. In this context, the recent creation of a new Diplomatic Security Deputy Assistant Secretary for High Threat Posts could be a positive first step if integrated into a sound strategy for DS reorganization.
3. As the President's personal representative, the Chief of Mission bears "direct and full responsibility for the security of [his or her] mission and all the personnel for whom [he or she is] responsible," and thus for risk management in the country to which he or she is accredited. In Washington, each regional Assistant Secretary has a corresponding responsibility to support the Chief of Mission in executing this duty. Regional bureaus should have augmented support within the bureau on security matters, to include a senior DS officer to report to the regional Assistant Secretary.
4. The Department should establish a panel of outside independent experts (military, security, humanitarian) with experience in high risk, high threat areas to support DS, identify best practices (from other agencies and other countries), and regularly evaluate U.S. security platforms in high risk, high threat posts.

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<sup>1</sup> The Board defines "high risk, high threat" posts as those in countries with high to critical levels of political violence and terrorism, governments of weak capacity, and security platforms that fall well below established standards.

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5. The Department should develop minimum security standards for occupancy of temporary facilities in high risk, high threat environments, and seek greater flexibility for the use of Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) sources of funding so that they can be rapidly made available for security upgrades at such facilities.
6. Before opening or re-opening critical threat or high risk, high threat posts, the Department should establish a multi-bureau support cell, residing in the regional bureau. The support cell should work to expedite the approval and funding for establishing and operating the post, implementing physical security measures, staffing of security and management personnel, and providing equipment, continuing as conditions at the post require.
7. The Nairobi and Dar es Salaam ARBs' report of January 1999 called for collocation of newly constructed State Department and other government agencies' facilities. All State Department and other government agencies' facilities should be collocated when they are in the same metropolitan area, unless a waiver has been approved.
8. The Secretary should require an action plan from DS, OBO and other relevant offices on the use of fire as a weapon against diplomatic facilities, including immediate steps to deal with urgent issues. The report should also include reviews of fire safety and crisis management training for all employees and dependents, safehaven standards and fire safety equipment, and recommendations to facilitate survival in smoke and fire situations.
9. Tripwires are too often treated only as indicators of threat rather than an essential trigger mechanism for serious risk management decisions and actions. The Department should revise its guidance to posts and require key offices to perform in-depth status checks of post tripwires.
10. Recalling the recommendations of the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam ARBs, the State Department must work with Congress to restore the Capital Security Cost Sharing Program at its full capacity, adjusted for inflation to approximately \$2.2 billion in fiscal year 2015, including an up to ten-year program addressing that need, prioritized for construction of new facilities in high risk, high threat areas. It should also work with Congress to expand utilization of Overseas

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Contingency Operations funding to respond to emerging security threats and vulnerabilities and operational requirements in high risk, high threat posts.

11. The Board supports the State Department's initiative to request additional Marines and expand the Marine Security Guard (MSG) Program – as well as corresponding requirements for staffing and funding. The Board also recommends that the State Department and DoD identify additional flexible MSG structures and request further resources for the Department and DoD to provide more capabilities and capacities at higher risk posts.

*STAFFING HIGH RISK, HIGH THREAT POSTS*

12. The Board strongly endorses the Department's request for increased DS personnel for high- and critical-threat posts and for additional Mobile Security Deployment teams, as well as an increase in DS domestic staffing in support of such action.
13. The Department should assign key policy, program, and security personnel at high risk, high threat posts for a minimum of one year. For less critical personnel, the temporary duty length (TDY) length should be no less than 120 days. The ARB suggests a comprehensive review of human resources authorities with an eye to using those authorities to promote sending more experienced officers, including "When Actually Employed" (WAE) personnel, to these high risk, high threat locations, particularly in security and management positions for longer periods of time.
14. The Department needs to review the staffing footprints at high risk, high threat posts, with particular attention to ensuring adequate Locally Employed Staff (LES) and management support. High risk, high threat posts must be funded and the human resources process prioritized to hire LES interpreters and translators.
15. With increased and more complex diplomatic activities in the Middle East, the Department should enhance its ongoing efforts to significantly upgrade its language capacity, especially Arabic, among American employees, including DS, and receive greater resources to do so.

*TRAINING AND AWARENESS*

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16. A panel of Senior Special Agents and Supervisory Special Agents should revisit DS high-threat training with respect to active internal defense and fire survival as well as Chief of Mission protective detail training.
17. The Diplomatic Security Training Center and Foreign Service Institute should collaborate in designing joint courses that integrate high threat training and risk management decision processes for senior and mid-level DS agents and Foreign Service Officers and better prepare them for leadership positions in high risk, high threat posts. They should consult throughout the U.S. government for best practices and lessons learned. Foreign Affairs Counter Threat training should be mandatory for high risk, high threat posts, whether an individual is assigned permanently or in longer-term temporary duty status.

SECURITY AND FIRE SAFETY EQUIPMENT

18. The Department should ensure provision of adequate fire safety and security equipment for safehavens and safe areas in non-Inman/SECCA<sup>2</sup> facilities, as well as high threat Inman facilities.
19. There have been technological advancements in non-lethal deterrents, and the State Department should ensure it rapidly and routinely identifies and procures additional options for non-lethal deterrents in high risk, high threat posts and trains personnel on their use.
20. DS should upgrade surveillance cameras at high risk, high threat posts for greater resolution, nighttime visibility, and monitoring capability beyond post.

INTELLIGENCE AND THREAT ANALYSIS

21. Post-2001, intelligence collection has expanded exponentially, but the Benghazi attacks are a stark reminder that we cannot over-rely on the certainty or even likelihood of warning intelligence. Careful attention should be given to factors showing a deteriorating threat situation in general as a basis for improving

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<sup>2</sup> “Inman buildings” are diplomatic facilities that meet the mandatory minimum physical security standards established after the 1985 Inman Report about the 1983 Embassy and Marine barracks bombings in Lebanon. “SECCA” refers to the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 1999, passed by Congress after the 1998 Nairobi and Dar es Salaam Embassy bombings. SECCA mandated setback and other standards for newly acquired diplomatic facilities.

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security posture. Key trends must be quickly identified and used to sharpen risk calculations.

22. The DS Office of Intelligence and Threat Analysis should report directly to the DS Assistant Secretary and directly supply threat analysis to all DS components, regional Assistant Secretaries and Chiefs of Mission in order to get key security-related threat information into the right hands more rapidly.

PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY

23. The Board recognizes that poor performance does not ordinarily constitute a breach of duty that would serve as a basis for disciplinary action but is instead addressed through the performance management system. However, the Board is of the view that findings of unsatisfactory leadership performance by senior officials in relation to the security incident under review should be a potential basis for discipline recommendations by future ARBs, and would recommend a revision of Department regulations or amendment to the relevant statute to this end.
24. The Board was humbled by the courage and integrity shown by those on the ground in Benghazi and Tripoli, in particular the DS agents and Annex team who defended their colleagues; the Tripoli response team which mobilized without hesitation; those in Benghazi and Tripoli who cared for the wounded; and the many U.S. government employees who served in Benghazi under difficult conditions in the months leading up to the September 11-12 attacks. We trust that the Department and relevant agencies will take the opportunity to recognize their exceptional valor and performance, which epitomized the highest ideals of government service.

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**POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT PRIOR TO THE ATTACKS**

On April 5, 2011, then-Special Envoy to the Libyan Transitional National Council (TNC) Chris Stevens arrived via a Greek cargo ship at the rebel-held city of Benghazi to re-establish a U.S. presence in Libya. The State Department had been absent from Libya since the Embassy in Tripoli suspended operations and evacuated its American personnel on February 25, 2011, amidst an escalating campaign by Muammar Qaddafi to suppress violently a popular uprising against his rule.

Benghazi, the largest city and historical power center in eastern Libya, was the launching point for the uprising against Qaddafi and a long time nexus of anti-regime activism. It also served as the rebel-led Transitional National Council's base of operations. Eastern Libya (Cyrenaica) had long felt neglected and oppressed by Qaddafi, and there had been historic tensions between it and the rest of the country. Throughout Qaddafi's decades-long rule, eastern Libya consistently lagged behind Tripoli in terms of infrastructure and standard of living even as it was responsible for the vast majority of Libya's oil production. Stevens' presence in the city was seen as a significant sign of U.S. support for the TNC and a recognition of the resurgence of eastern Libya's political influence.

Benghazi was the seat of the Senussi monarchy until 1954, the site of a U.S. consulate, which was overrun by a mob and burned in 1967, and the place where Qaddafi began his 1969 revolution against the monarchy. Qaddafi's subsequent combination of oppression and neglect enhanced the city's sense of marginalization, and its after-effects were felt more widely in the eastern region where a Salafist jihadist movement took root. Jihadis from Benghazi engaged in Afghanistan against the Soviets and took up arms against U.S. forces in the post-2003 Iraq insurgency. Many of them reemerged in 2011 as leaders of anti-Qaddafi militias in eastern Libya.

Stevens initially operated from the Tibesti Hotel in downtown Benghazi. He was accompanied by a security contingent of 10 Diplomatic Security agents whose primary responsibilities were to provide personal protective services. Stevens' mission was to serve as the liaison with the TNC in preparation for a post-Qaddafi democratic government in Libya. By all accounts, he was extremely effective,

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earned the admiration of countless numbers of Libyans, and personified the U.S. government commitment to a free and democratic Libya.

Benghazi, however, was still very much a conflict zone. On June 1, 2011, a car bomb exploded outside the Tibesti Hotel, and shortly thereafter a credible threat against the Special Envoy mission prompted Stevens to move to the Annex. On June 21, 2011, he and his security contingent moved to what would become the Special Mission Benghazi compound (SMC). By the end of August 2011, the walled compound consisted of three sections (Villas A, B, and C) on 13 acres. (Use of Villa A was discontinued in January 2012, when the SMC footprint was consolidated into the Villas B and C compounds, some eight-acres total.)

On July 15, 2011, the United States officially recognized the TNC as Libya's legitimate governing authority although Qaddafi and his forces still retained control over significant portions of the country, including Tripoli. The TNC continued attacking the remaining Qaddafi strongholds, and Tripoli fell earlier than expected at the end of August. The TNC immediately began moving the government from Benghazi to Tripoli. By early September, 21 members of State Department Mobile Security Deployment teams were in Tripoli with the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in preparation for the resumption of operations of the U.S. Embassy, which Ambassador Gene Cretz officially re-opened on September 22, 2011. From September 2011 onwards, Embassy Tripoli was open with a skeleton staff built on temporary duty (TDY) assignments, to include the DCM and Regional Security Officer (RSO). (The fall of Tripoli took place shortly after Embassy Tripoli lost its assigned staff and bureaucratically ceased to exist, pursuant to Department regulations regarding the length of time a post can remain open in evacuation status.)

Although the TNC declared that Tripoli would continue to be the capital of a post-Qaddafi Libya, many of the influential players in the TNC remained based in Benghazi. Stevens continued as Special Envoy to the TNC in Benghazi until he departed Libya on November 17, 2011, after which the Special Envoy position was not filled. Stevens was replaced by an experienced Civil Service employee who served for 73 days in what came to be called the "principal officer" position in Benghazi. After November 2011, the principal officer slot became a TDY assignment for officers with varying levels of experience who served in Benghazi anywhere from 10 days to over two months, usually without transiting Tripoli. In December 2011, the Under Secretary for Management approved a one-year continuation of the U.S. Special Mission in Benghazi, which was never a consulate

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and never formally notified to the Libyan government. Stevens arrived in Tripoli on May 26, 2012, to replace Cretz as Ambassador.

Throughout Libya, the security vacuum left by Qaddafi's departure, the continued presence of pro-Qaddafi supporters, the prevalence of and easy access to weapons, the inability of the interim government to reestablish a strong security apparatus, and the resulting weakness of those security forces that remained led to a volatile situation in which militias previously united in opposition to Qaddafi were now jockeying for position in the new Libya. Frequent clashes, including assassinations, took place between contesting militias. Fundamentalist influence with Salafi and al Qaeda connections was also growing, including notably in the eastern region. Public attitudes in Benghazi continued to be positive toward Americans, and it was generally seen as safer for Americans given U.S support of the TNC during the war. However, 2012 saw an overall deterioration of the security environment in Benghazi, as highlighted by a series of security incidents involving the Special Mission, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and third-country nationals and diplomats:

- March 18, 2012 – Armed robbery occurs at the British School in Benghazi.
- March 22, 2012 – Members of a militia searching for a suspect fire their weapons near the SMC and attempt to enter.
- April 2, 2012 – A UK armored diplomatic vehicle is attacked after driving into a local protest. The vehicle was damaged but occupants uninjured.
- April 6, 2012 – A gelatina bomb (traditional homemade explosive device used for fishing) is thrown over the SMC north wall.
- April 10, 2012 – An IED (gelatina or dynamite stick) is thrown at the motorcade of the UN Special Envoy to Libya in Benghazi.
- April 26, 2012 – Special Mission Benghazi principal officer is evacuated from International Medical University (IMU) after a fistfight escalated to gunfire between Tripoli-based trade delegation security personnel and IMU security.
- April 27, 2012 – Two South African nationals in Libya as part of U.S.-funded weapons abatement, unexploded ordnance removal and demining project are detained at gunpoint by militia, questioned and released.
- May 22, 2012 – Benghazi International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) building struck by rocket propelled grenades (RPGs).
- May 28, 2012 – A previously unknown organization, Omar Abdurrahman group, claims responsibility for the ICRC attack and issues a threat against the United States on social media sites.

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- June 6, 2012 – IED attack on the SMC. The IED detonates with no injuries but blows a large hole in the compound's exterior wall. Omar Abdurrahman group makes an unsubstantiated claim of responsibility.
- June 8, 2012 – Two hand grenades target a parked UK diplomatic vehicle in Sabha (800 km south of Benghazi).
- June 11, 2012 – While in Benghazi, the British Ambassador's convoy is attacked with an RPG and possible AK-47s. Two UK security officers are injured; the UK closes its mission in Benghazi the following day.
- June 12, 2012 – An RPG attack is made on the ICRC compound in Misrata (400 km west of Benghazi).
- June 18, 2012 – Protestors storm the Tunisian consulate in Benghazi.
- July 29, 2012 – An IED is found on grounds of the Tibesti Hotel.
- July 30, 2012 – Sudanese Consul in Benghazi is carjacked and driver beaten.
- July 31, 2012 – Seven Iranian-citizen ICRC workers abducted in Benghazi.
- August 5, 2012 – ICRC Misrata office is attacked with RPGs. ICRC withdraws its representatives from Misrata and Benghazi.
- August 9, 2012 – A Spanish-American dual national NGO worker is abducted from the Islamic Cultural Center in Benghazi and released the same day.
- August 20, 2012 – A small bomb is thrown at an Egyptian diplomat's vehicle parked outside of the Egyptian consulate in Benghazi.

It is worth noting that the events above took place against a general backdrop of political violence, assassinations targeting former regime officials, lawlessness, and an overarching absence of central government authority in eastern Libya. While the June 6 IED at the SMC and the May ICRC attack were claimed by the same group, none of the remaining attacks were viewed in Tripoli and Benghazi as linked or having common perpetrators, which were not viewed as linked or having common perpetrators. This also tempered reactions in Washington. Furthermore, the Board believes that the longer a post is exposed to continuing high levels of violence the more it comes to consider security incidents which might otherwise provoke a reaction as normal, thus raising the threshold for an incident to cause a reassessment of risk and mission continuation. This was true for both people on the ground serving in Libya and in Washington.

While the June IED attack and the RPG attack targeting the UK convoy in Benghazi prompted the Special Mission to reduce movements off compound and have a one-week pause between principal officers, the successful nature of Libya's

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July 7, 2012, national elections – which exceeded expectations – renewed Washington’s optimism in Libya’s future. Nevertheless, the immediate period after the elections did not see the central government increase its capacity to consolidate control or provide security in eastern Libya, as efforts to form a government floundered and extremist militias in and outside Benghazi continued to work to strengthen their grip. At the time of the September attacks, Benghazi remained a lawless town nominally controlled by the Supreme Security Council (SSC) – a coalition of militia elements loosely cobbled into a single force to provide interim security – but in reality run by a diverse group of local Islamist militias, each of whose strength ebbed and flowed depending on the ever-shifting alliances and loyalties of various members. There was a notional national police presence, but it was ineffectual. By August 2012, Special Mission Benghazi would evaluate the worsening security situation and its implications.

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*“I was at the foot of the wide marble staircase when the breakthrough occurred. Fanatical knife-carrying intruders, bleeding from cuts received as they were pushed through broken windows, ran down the hall. Putting on gas masks and dropping tear gas grenades, we engaged them on the stairs with rifle butts. In seconds tear gas saturated the area. We then moved into the vault, securing the steel combination door, locking in ten persons.... My greatest fear, which I kept to myself, was that gasoline for the generator would be found, sloshed under the vault door and ignited. When after minutes this did not happen, our hearts sank, nonetheless, as outside smoke wafted in and we knew the building had been set afire.”*

*-- First-person account of the June 5, 1967 mob siege of the then-U.S. Consulate in Benghazi*

**TIMELINE OF THE ATTACKS**

**September 11-12, 2012**

*(All times are best estimates based on existing data and should be considered approximate.)*

*The Prelude – the Ambassador’s Arrival*

Ambassador Chris Stevens arrived in Benghazi, Libya on September 10, 2012, accompanied by two temporary duty (TDY) Assistant Regional Security Officers (ARSOs) from Tripoli. It was the Ambassador’s first visit to Benghazi since he departed as then-Special Envoy in November 2011. With the Ambassador’s arrival, there were eight Americans at the Special Mission compound (SMC) on September 10-11, 2012, including the Ambassador; Information Management Officer (IMO) Sean Smith, who arrived in Benghazi one week earlier to provide TDY communications and management support; and five Diplomatic Security (DS) agents (three assigned on short-term TDY to Benghazi – “TDY RSO”, “ARSO 1” and “ARSO 2” – and the two who traveled from Tripoli to provide protection for the Ambassador during his visit – “ARSO 3” and “ARSO 4”). The eighth American, the TDY Benghazi principal officer, completed his 13-day assignment and returned to his full-time job in Tripoli the morning of September 11, leaving seven Americans at the compound. Ambassador Stevens was scheduled to remain in Benghazi until September 14, and his visit was timed in part to fill the staffing gaps between TDY principal officers as well as to open an American Corner at a local school and to reconnect with local contacts.

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In the absence of an effective central government security presence, the Special Mission's Libyan security contingent was composed of four armed members of the February 17 Martyrs' Brigade (February 17) – a local umbrella organization of militias dominant in Benghazi (some of which were Islamist) and loosely affiliated with the Libyan government, but not under its control. They resided in a guest house building on compound. Normally four members resided on the Special Mission compound near the front gate, but on September 11 one had been absent for several days, reportedly due to a family illness. The Special Mission also had an unarmed, contract local guard force (LGF), Blue Mountain Libya (BML), which provided five guards per eight-hour shift, 24/7, to open and close the gates, patrol the compound, and give warning in case of an attack.

After the Ambassador's arrival at the Special Mission on September 10, ARSO 1 gave the Ambassador a tour of the SMC and pointed out the safe area and escape hatch windows in the Ambassador's room in Villa C. Later that afternoon, the Ambassador visited the Annex for a briefing. He then met with the City Council at a local hotel for dinner, an event at which local media invited by the Council showed up unexpectedly, despite U.S. efforts to keep the Ambassador's program and movements from being publicized.

*Security Environment on September 11, Preceding Attacks*

In consultation with the TDY RSO and mindful of the threat environment and the September 11 anniversary, Ambassador Stevens did not leave the SMC on September 11, but rather held meetings there. At approximately 0645 local that morning, a BML contract guard saw an unknown individual in a Libyan Supreme Security Council (SSC) police uniform apparently taking photos of the compound villas with a cell phone from the second floor of a building under construction across the street to the north of the SMC. The individual was reportedly stopped by BML guards, denied any wrongdoing, and departed in a police car with two others. This was reported to ARSOs 1 and 2. Later that morning they inspected the area where the individual was seen standing and informed the Annex of the incident. There had not been any related threat reporting. The local February 17 militia headquarters was informed of the incident and reportedly complained to the local SSC on the Special Mission's behalf. The Ambassador reviewed a Special Mission-drafted complaint to local authorities on the surveillance incident; however, it was not submitted due to the typically early closure of Libyan government offices. Later on September 11, the Ambassador was informed by his Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in Tripoli of the breach of the Embassy Cairo

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compound that had occurred that day and briefly discussed the news with ARSO 3. The TDY RSO was also informed of the Cairo compound breach by his Regional Security Officer counterpart in Tripoli and shared the information with colleagues at the Annex.

At approximately 1940 local, Ambassador Stevens and an accompanying ARSO escorted a Turkish diplomat to the SMC's main exit at the north C1 gate, where nothing out of the ordinary was noted. Some 30 minutes later, between 2010 and 2030 local, a UK security team supporting a day visit by British diplomats dropped off vehicles and equipment at the SMC (per arrangements made after the UK diplomatic office in Benghazi suspended operations in June 2012). When the UK security team departed via the C1 gate at about 2030 local, there were no signs of anything unusual, including no roadblocks outside of the compound, and traffic flowed normally.

Ambassador Stevens and IMO Sean Smith retired for the night to Villa C at about 2100 local, while ARSO 4 watched a video in the Villa C common space. ARSOs 1, 2, and 3 were sitting together outside and behind Villa C; the TDY RSO was working in the workspace building referred to as the "Office" or "TOC" (Tactical Operations Center), near the Villa B compound, which was connected to the Villa C compound by an alleyway. From the TOC, the TDY RSO could monitor a series of security cameras placed in and around the perimeter of the SMC. The ARSOs were each armed with their standard issue sidearm pistol; their "kits," generally consisting of body armor, radio and an M4 rifle, were in their bedroom/sleeping areas, in accord with Special Mission practice.

### *The Attack on the Special Mission Compound*

An SSC police vehicle, which had arrived at the main compound gate (C1) at 2102 local, departed at 2142. The Special Mission had requested that a marked SSC police car be posted outside of the compound 24/7, but in practice a car was there only intermittently. The Special Mission had requested this presence again, specifically for the duration of the Ambassador's visit. A subsequent local press report quotes an SSC official as saying that he ordered the removal of the car "to prevent civilian casualties."

Around the same time, the TDY RSO working in the TOC heard shots and an explosion. He then saw via security camera dozens of individuals, many armed, begin to enter the compound through the main entrance at the C1 gate. He hit the

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duck and cover alarm and yelled a warning over the radio, and recalled no such warning from the February 17 or BML guards, who had already begun to flee to points south and east in the compound, towards the Villa B area. ARSOs 1 and 2 heard an attack warning from the BML guards passed on over the radio. The TDY RSO also alerted the Annex and Embassy Tripoli by cell phone.

The other three ARSOs behind Villa C also heard gunfire and explosions, as well as chanting, and responded immediately along with ARSO 4, who was inside Villa C. Following the SMC's emergency plan, ARSO 1 entered Villa C to secure the Ambassador and IMO in the safe area and to retrieve his kit; ARSOs 2, 3, and 4 moved to retrieve their kits, which were located in Villa B and the TOC. ARSO 1 in Villa C swiftly located the Ambassador and IMO Smith, asked them to don body armor, and led them into the safe area in Villa C, which ARSO 1 secured. He then reported their whereabouts by radio to the TDY RSO in the TOC. ARSO 1, armed with an M4 rifle, shotgun and pistol, took up a defensive position inside the Villa C safe area, with line of sight to the safe area gate and out of view of potential intruders. ARSO 1 gave his cell phone to the Ambassador, who began making calls to local contacts and Embassy Tripoli requesting assistance.

From Villa C, ARSO 4 ran to his sleeping quarters in Villa B to retrieve his kit, while ARSOs 2 and 3 ran to the TOC, where ARSO 3 had last seen the Ambassador, and where ARSO 2's kit was located. (ARSO 2's sleeping quarters were in the TOC, making him the designated "TOC Officer" in their emergency react plan.) ARSO 3, upon not finding the Ambassador in the TOC, ran to Villa B to get his kit; ARSO 2 remained in the TOC with the TDY RSO and shared notification and communication duties with him. At Villa B, ARSO 3 encountered ARSO 4, who was also arming and equipping himself, and the two then attempted to return to Villa C. They turned back, however, after seeing many armed intruders blocking the alley between Villas B and C. ARSOs 3 and 4, outnumbered and outgunned by the armed intruders in the alley, returned to Villa B and barricaded themselves in a back room, along with one LGF member whom they had encountered outside Villa B.

Attack Continues, Use of Fire as a Weapon

Sometime between 2145 and 2200 local, armed intruders appear to have used filled fuel cans that were stored next to new, uninstalled generators at the February 17 living quarters near the C1 entrance to burn that building. The crowd

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also lit on fire vehicles that were parked nearby. Members of the crowd then moved to Villa C.

In Villa C, ARSO 1, who was protecting Ambassador Stevens and IMO Smith in the safe area, heard intruders breaking through the Villa C front door. Men armed with AK rifles started to destroy the living room contents and then approached the safe area gate and started banging on it. ARSO 1 did not want to compromise their location in the safe area by engaging the intruders, and he warned the Ambassador and IMO Smith to prepare for the intruders to try to blast the safe area gate locks open. Instead the intruders departed, and the lights in Villa C appeared to dim. ARSO 1 realized that smoke from fires set inside the villa, away from his vantage point, was reducing the light and visibility. (There was no line of sight to Villa C from the Villa B/TOC compound where the TDY RSO and three ARSOs were barricaded. The TDY RSO in the TOC did not see smoke emerge on the view from the camera near Villa C until shortly after 2200 local.)

As smoke engulfed the Villa C safe area, ARSO 1 led Ambassador Stevens and IMO Smith into a bathroom with an exterior window. All three crawled into the bathroom, while the thick, black smoke made breathing difficult and reduced visibility to zero. ARSO 1 tried to seal the door with towels and provide some ventilation by opening the window. Instead, opening the window worsened conditions and drew more smoke into the bathroom, making it even more difficult to breathe. ARSO 1 determined that they could no longer stay in the safe area and yelled to the others, whom he could no longer see, to follow him to an adjacent bedroom, where there was an egress window. ARSO 1 crawled on his hands and knees through a hallway to the bedroom, unable to see, while yelling and banging on the floor to guide the Ambassador and IMO Smith to safety. ARSO 1 opened the window grill and exited the building, collapsing onto a small, partly enclosed patio, at which point he believed he was being fired upon. Immediately following his exit, ARSO 1 realized the Ambassador and IMO had not followed him out the window. He then re-entered Villa C through the egress window several times to search for his colleagues while under fire by the intruders outside. He was unable to locate the Ambassador or IMO Smith, and severe heat and smoke forced him to exit the building to recover between each attempt. After several attempts, he climbed a ladder to the roof where he radioed the TOC for assistance and attempted unsuccessfully to ventilate the building by breaking a skylight. Due to severe smoke inhalation, however, ARSO 1 was almost unintelligible, but the TDY RSO and ARSO 2 in the TOC finally understood him to be saying that he did not have the Ambassador or IMO Smith with him.

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While Villa C was under attack, armed individuals looted Villa B's interior and attempted to enter the area where ARSOs 3 and 4 were barricaded. The intruders carried jerry cans and were seen on security cameras trying to dump them on vehicles outside the TOC, but they were apparently empty. A group of intruders also attempted unsuccessfully to break down the TOC entrance.

*Annex Responds, DS Agents Rally for Further Rescue Efforts*

Just prior to receiving the TDY RSO's distress call shortly after 2142 local, the head of Annex security heard multiple explosions coming from the north in the direction of the SMC. The Annex security head immediately began to organize his team's departure and notified his superiors, who began to contact local security elements to request support. The Annex response team departed its compound in two vehicles at approximately 2205 local. The departure of the Annex team was not delayed by orders from superiors; the team leader decided on his own to depart the Annex compound once it was apparent, despite a brief delay to permit their continuing efforts, that rapid support from local security elements was not forthcoming.

While the TDY RSO continued to man the TOC and communicate with Tripoli, the Annex, and Washington, ARSO 2 used a smoke grenade to obscure his movements from the TOC to Villa B, where he joined ARSOs 3 and 4 who were barricaded inside. By this point, the first group of attackers appeared to have receded. The three ARSOs then drove an armored vehicle parked outside of the TOC to Villa C, where they assisted ARSO 1, who was in distress on the roof, vomiting from severe smoke inhalation and losing consciousness. ARSOs 2, 3, and 4 repeatedly entered Villa C through the egress window, at times crawling on their hands and knees through the safe area due to heavy smoke and the lack of air and visibility.

Near the SMC, the Annex team hoped to bring along friendly forces from militia compounds located along their route. The Annex team stopped at the intersection to the west of the C1 entrance and attempted to convince militia members there to assist. There was periodic, ineffective small arms fire in the team's location from the direction of the Special Mission.

Unable to secure additional assistance, the team moved on to the SMC. The February 17 living quarters and adjacent vehicles were burned, and heavy smoke

was pouring out of the still smoldering Villa C. The Annex team made contact with the four ARSOs at Villa C. Some Annex team members went to retrieve the TDY RSO from the TOC, while other Annex team members joined the ARSOs in their search for the Ambassador.

During their searches of the Villa C safe area, the ARSOs found and removed the body of IMO Smith with Annex security team assistance. The team checked for vital signs and verified that IMO Smith was already deceased, apparently due to smoke inhalation. Other Annex security team members and the TDY RSO joined up with the ARSOs again to enter Villa C via the egress window but were unable to locate Ambassador Stevens despite multiple attempts. Heat and smoke continued to be limiting factors in their ability to move farther into the safe area. When the TDY RSO attempted to enter Villa C through the front door, the ceiling collapsed. During these rescue attempts, an ARSO received a severe laceration to his arm.

*Second Phase Attack on the Compound, Evacuation to the Annex*

At the urging of the Annex security team and friendly militia members, who warned that the compound was at risk of being overrun, the TDY RSO and four ARSOs departed for the Annex without having found Ambassador Stevens. As the Annex team provided cover fire, the five DS agents' fully armored vehicle departed and took hostile fire as they left the SMC and turned right out of the C1 entrance. The driver, ARSO 1, reversed direction to avoid a crowd farther down the street, then reverted back to the original easterly route towards the crowd after a man whom the DS agents believed to be with February 17 signaled them to do so. Farther ahead, another man in a small group of individuals then motioned to them to enter a neighboring compound, some 300 meters to the east of the C1 entrance of the Special Mission compound. The DS agents suspected a trap, ignored this signal, and continued past. The group along the route then opened fire at the vehicle's side, shattering and almost penetrating the armored glass and blowing out two tires. While the identities of the individuals who fired upon the DS agents is unknown, they may have been part of the initial wave of attackers who swarmed the SMC earlier that night. A roadblock was present outside this compound and groups of attackers were seen entering it at about the time this vehicle movement was taking place.

ARSO 1 accelerated past the armed crowd and navigated around another crowd and roadblock near the end of the road, driving down the center median and



into the oncoming lane at one point to bypass stopped traffic. Two cars followed, with one turning off and the other following them with its lights off until it turned into a warehouse area not far from the Annex. The DS vehicle then proceeded to the Annex, arriving around 2330 local. There the ARSOs joined Annex personnel and took up defensive positions, to await the Annex security and Tripoli response team. The situation was relatively quiet. Wounded personnel received medical support.

Back at the SMC, the Annex security team at Villa C used small arms fire and took defensive positions to respond to an apparent second phase attack, which lasted about 15 minutes and included small arms fire and at least three rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) launched from outside the C3 gate. With their many and repeated attempts to retrieve the Ambassador having proven fruitless and militia members warning them the SMC could not be held much longer, the Annex team departed the SMC, carrying with them the body of IMO Smith. They arrived back at the Annex and moved to take up additional defensive positions.

#### *Embassy Tripoli Response*

Upon notification of the attack from the TDY RSO around 2145 local, Embassy Tripoli set up a command center and notified Washington. About 2150 local, the DCM was able to reach Ambassador Stevens, who briefly reported that the SMC was under attack before the call cut off. The Embassy notified Benina Airbase in Benghazi of a potential need for logistic support and aircraft for extraction and received full cooperation. The DCM contacted the Libyan President and Prime Minister's offices to urge them to mobilize a rescue effort, and kept Washington apprised of post's efforts. The Embassy also reached out to Libyan Air Force and Armed Forces contacts, February 17 leadership, and UN and third country embassies, among others. Within hours, Embassy Tripoli chartered a private airplane and deployed a seven-person security team, which included two U.S. military personnel, to Benghazi.

At the direction of the U.S. military's Africa Command (AFRICOM), DoD moved a remotely piloted, unarmed surveillance aircraft which arrived over the SMC shortly before the DS team departed. A second remotely piloted, unarmed surveillance aircraft relieved the first, and monitored the eventual evacuation of personnel from the Annex to Benghazi airport later on the morning of September 12.

*Uncertainty on Ambassador Stevens' Whereabouts*

U.S. efforts to determine Ambassador Stevens' whereabouts were unsuccessful for several hours. At approximately 0200 local, Embassy Tripoli received a phone call from ARSO 1's cell phone, which he had given to the Ambassador while they were sheltered in the safe area. A male, Arabic-speaking caller said an unresponsive male who matched the physical description of the Ambassador was at a hospital. There was confusion over which hospital this might be, and the caller was unable to provide a picture of the Ambassador or give any other proof that he was with him. There was some concern that the call might be a ruse to lure American personnel into a trap. With the Benghazi Medical Center (BMC) believed to be dangerous for American personnel due to the possibility attackers were being treated there, a Libyan contact of the Special Mission was dispatched to the BMC and later confirmed the Ambassador's identity and that he was deceased.

BMC personnel would later report that at approximately 0115 local on September 12, an unidentified, unresponsive male foreigner – subsequently identified as Ambassador Stevens – was brought to the emergency room by six civilians. The identities of these civilians are unknown at the time of this report, but to the best knowledge of the Board these were “good Samaritans” among the hordes of looters and bystanders who descended upon the Special Mission after the DS and Annex teams departed. With the clearing of smoke, Ambassador Stevens' rescuers found him within a room in the safe area of Villa C, did not know his identity, pulled him out through an egress window, and sought medical attention for him. Although the Ambassador did not show signs of life upon arrival at the BMC, doctors attempted to resuscitate him for some 45 minutes before declaring him deceased, by apparent smoke inhalation.

*Attacks on the Annex*

Just before midnight, shortly after the DS and Annex security teams arrived from the SMC, the Annex began to be targeted by gunfire and RPGs, which continued intermittently for an hour. Annex security personnel engaged from their defensive positions, which were reinforced by DS agents. Other personnel remained in contact with Embassy Tripoli from the Annex.

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The seven-person response team from Embassy Tripoli arrived in Benghazi to lend support. It arrived at the Annex about 0500 local. Less than fifteen minutes later, the Annex came under mortar and RPG attack, with five mortar rounds impacting close together in under 90 seconds. Three rounds hit the roof of an Annex building, killing security officers Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty. The attack also severely injured one ARSO and one Annex security team member. Annex, Tripoli, and ARSO security team members at other locations moved rapidly to provide combat first aid to the injured.

At approximately 0630 local, all U.S. government personnel evacuated with support from a quasi-governmental Libyan militia. They arrived at the airport without incident. The DoD unarmed surveillance aircraft provided visual oversight during the evacuation. Embassy Tripoli lost communication with the convoy at one point during transit, but quickly regained it.

Evacuees, including all wounded personnel, departed Benghazi on the chartered jet at approximately 0730 local. Embassy Tripoli staff, including the Embassy nurse, met the first evacuation flight at Tripoli International Airport. Wounded personnel were transferred to a local hospital, in exemplary coordination that helped save the lives of two severely injured Americans.

Embassy Tripoli worked with the Libyan government to have a Libyan Air Force C-130 take the remaining U.S. government personnel from Benghazi to Tripoli. Two American citizen State Department contractors traveled to the airport and linked up with the remaining U.S. government personnel. While awaiting transport, the TDY RSO and Annex personnel continued to reach out to Libyan contacts to coordinate the transport of the presumed remains of Ambassador Stevens to the airport. The body was brought to the airport in what appeared to be a local ambulance at 0825 local, and the TDY RSO verified Ambassador Stevens' identity.

At 1130 local, September 12, 2012, the Libyan government-provided C-130 evacuation flight landed in Tripoli with the last U.S. government personnel from Benghazi and the remains of the four Americans killed, who were transported to a local hospital.

In coordination with the State Department and Embassy Tripoli, the Department of Defense sent two U.S. Air Force planes (a C-17 and a C-130) from Germany to Tripoli to provide medical evacuation support for the wounded. At 1915 local on September 12, Embassy Tripoli evacuees, Benghazi personnel, and

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those wounded in the attacks departed Tripoli on the C-17 aircraft, with military doctors and nurses aboard providing en route medical care to the injured. The aircraft arrived at Ramstein Air Force Base at approximately 2230 (Tripoli time) on September 12, just over 24 hours after the attacks in Benghazi had commenced.

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**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

- 1. The attacks in Benghazi were security-related, resulting in the deaths of four U.S. personnel after terrorists attacked two separate U.S. government facilities – the Special Mission compound (SMC) and the Annex.**

Identification of the perpetrators and their motivations are the subject of an ongoing FBI criminal investigation. The Board concluded that no protest took place before the Special Mission and Annex attacks, which were unanticipated in their scale and intensity.

ADEQUACY OF SECURITY SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 11, 2012

- 2. Systemic failures and leadership and management deficiencies at senior levels within two bureaus of the State Department resulted in a Special Mission security posture that was inadequate for Benghazi and grossly inadequate to deal with the attack that took place.**

Through the course of its inquiry, the Board interviewed over 100 individuals, reviewed thousands of pages of documents, and viewed hours of video footage. On the basis of its comprehensive review of this information, the Board remains fully convinced that responsibility for the tragic loss of life, injuries, and damage to U.S. facilities and property rests solely and completely with the terrorists who perpetrated the attack.

Overriding Factors

This is not to say, however, that there are no lessons to be learned. A recurring theme throughout the Board's work was one also touched upon by the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam ARBs in 1999. Simply put, in the months leading up to September 11, 2012, security in Benghazi was not recognized and implemented as a "shared responsibility" in Washington, resulting in stove-piped discussions and decisions on policy and security. Key decisions, such as the extension of the State Department presence in Benghazi until December 2012, or non-decisions in Washington, such as the failure to establish standards for Benghazi and to meet them, or the lack of a cohesive staffing plan, essentially set up Benghazi as a

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floating TDY platform with successive principal officers often confined to the SMC due to threats and inadequate resources, and RSOs resorting to field-expedient solutions to correct security shortfalls.

Communication, cooperation, and coordination between Washington, Tripoli, and Benghazi occurred collegially at the working-level but were constrained by a lack of transparency, responsiveness, and leadership at senior bureau levels. The DS Bureau's action officers who worked on Libya are to be commended for their efforts within DS and across the Department to provide additional security resources to Benghazi. Action officers in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs' (NEA) Office of Maghreb Affairs and Executive Office showed similar dedication in collaborating on solutions with their DS counterparts and responding to TDY staffing demands. However, in DS, NEA, and at post, there appeared to be very real confusion over who, ultimately, was responsible and empowered to make decisions based on both policy and security considerations.

The DS Bureau showed a lack of proactive senior leadership with respect to Benghazi, failing to ensure that the priority security needs of a high risk, high threat post were met. At the same time, with attention in late 2011 shifting to growing crises in Egypt and Syria, the NEA Bureau's front office showed a lack of ownership of Benghazi's security issues, and a tendency to rely totally on DS for the latter. The Board also found that Embassy Tripoli leadership, saddled with their own staffing and security challenges, did not single out a special need for increased security for Benghazi.

Further shortfalls in Washington coordination were manifested by the flawed process by which Special Mission Benghazi's extension until the end of December 2012 was approved, a decision that did not take security considerations adequately into account. The result was the continuation of Special Mission Benghazi with an uncertain future and a one-year expiration date that made allocations of resources for security upgrades and personnel assignments difficult.

Another key driver behind the weak security platform in Benghazi was the decision to treat Benghazi as a temporary, residential facility, not officially notified to the host government, even though it was also a full time office facility. This resulted in the Special Mission compound being excepted from office facility standards and accountability under the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 1999 (SECCA) and the Overseas Security Policy Board (OSPB). Benghazi's initial platform in November 2011 was far short of OSPB

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standards and remained so even in September 2012, despite multiple field-expedient upgrades funded by DS. (As a temporary, residential facility, SMC was not eligible for OBO-funded security upgrades.) A comprehensive upgrade and risk-mitigation plan did not exist, nor was a comprehensive security review conducted by Washington for Benghazi in 2012. The unique circumstances surrounding the creation of the mission in Benghazi as a temporary mission outside the realm of permanent diplomatic posts resulted in significant disconnects and support gaps.

Personnel

The Board found the short-term, transitory nature of Benghazi's staffing to be another primary driver behind the inadequate security platform in Benghazi. Staffing was at times woefully insufficient considering post's security posture and high risk, high threat environment. The end result was a lack of institutional knowledge and mission capacity which could not be overcome by talent and hard work alone, although the Board found ample evidence of both in those who served there. The situation was exacerbated by the lack of Locally Employed Staff (LES) who would normally provide a backstop of continuity, local knowledge, and language ability. This staffing "churn" had significant detrimental effects on the post's ability to assess adequately both the political and security environment, as well as to provide the necessary advocacy and follow-through on major, essential security upgrades.

The Board determined that DS staffing levels in Benghazi after Embassy Tripoli re-opened were inadequate, decreasing significantly after then-Special Envoy Stevens' departure in November 2011. Although a full complement of five DS agents for Benghazi was initially projected, and later requested multiple times, Special Mission Benghazi achieved a level of five DS agents (not counting DoD-provided TDY Site Security Team personnel sent by Embassy Tripoli) for only 23 days between January 1-September 9, 2012.

As it became clear that DS would not provide a steady complement of five TDY DS agents to Benghazi, expectations on the ground were lowered by the daunting task of gaining approvals and the reality of an ever-shifting DS personnel platform. From discussions with former Benghazi-based staff, Board members concluded that the persistence of DS leadership in Washington in refusing to provide a steady platform of four to five DS agents created a resignation on the

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part of post about asking for more. The TDY DS agents resorted to doing the best they could with the limited resources provided.

Furthermore, DS's reliance on volunteers for TDY positions meant that the ARSOs in Benghazi often had relatively little or no prior DS program management or overseas experience. For a time, more experienced RSOs were sent out on longer term TDYs, but even that appeared to diminish after June 2012, exactly at the time the security environment in Benghazi was deteriorating further. It bears emphasizing, however, that the Board found the work done by these often junior DS agents to be exemplary. But given the threat environment and with very little operational oversight from more experienced, senior colleagues, combined with an under-resourced security platform, these agents were not well served by their leadership in Washington. The lack of Arabic-language skills among most American personnel assigned to Benghazi and the lack of a dedicated LES interpreter and sufficient local staff also served as a barrier to effective communication and situational awareness at the Special Mission.

Required security training for DS agents prior to service in Benghazi consisted of the High Threat Training Course (HTTC). However, domestically-based DS agents who had not served abroad did not have the opportunity to receive RSO training before serving in Benghazi. In addition, after April 2012 all personnel scheduled to serve in Libya for over 30 days were required to take the Foreign Affairs Counter Threat (FACT) training. IMOs, who also served as the "management officer" at post, did not, as a prerequisite, receive any basic management or General Services Officer (GSO) training to prepare them for their duties.

The Board determined that reliance on February 17 for security in the event of an attack was misplaced, even though February 17 had been considered to have responded satisfactorily to previous, albeit less threatening, incidents. The four assigned February 17 guards were insufficient and did not have the requisite skills and reliability to provide a reasonable level of security on a 24/7 basis for an eight-acre compound with an extended perimeter wall. In the days prior to the attack and on September 11, 2012, one was absent. Over the course of its inquiry, the Board also learned of troubling indicators of February 17's loyalties and its readiness to assist U.S. personnel. In the weeks preceding the Ambassador's arrival, February 17 had complained about salaries and the lack of a contract for its personnel. At the time of the attacks, February 17 had ceased accompanying Special Mission vehicle movements in protest. The Blue Mountain Libya (BML)

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unarmed guards, whose primary responsibilities were to provide early warning and control access to the SMC, were also poorly skilled.

Physical Security

Given the threat environment, the physical security platform in Benghazi was inadequate. It is incumbent upon the Board, however, to acknowledge that several upgrades and repairs took place over 2012. DS provided additional funding for the Local Guard Force (LGF), February 17, and residential security upgrades, including heightening the outer perimeter wall, safety grills on safe area egress windows that helped save the life of ARSO 1 on the night of September 11, concrete jersey barriers, manual drop-arm vehicle barriers, a steel gate for the Villa C safe area, some locally manufactured steel doors, sandbag fortifications, security cameras, some additional security lighting, guard booths, and an Internal Defense Notification System. Because OBO does not fund security upgrades for “temporary” facilities, DS also identified non-traditional funding streams to fund physical security upgrades and worked with the IMOs, NEA and Embassy Tripoli to move funds and supplies to Benghazi. The Engineering Security Office (ESO) in Cairo provided strong technical support and regularly visited. Following the June 2012 IED incident, which blew a large hole in the compound wall, DS, OBO, Tripoli, NEA and ESO Cairo immediately responded to Benghazi’s request for assistance. Tripoli identified OBO funds that could be used to fix the wall, and ESO Cairo traveled to Benghazi on June 8 to provide technical support. The TDY IMOs worked tirelessly with the RSOs, Tripoli procurement and financial management staff, and Libyan professionals on statements of work, contracts and funding for the emergency repair of the SMC wall and for the other physical security upgrades, as well as ongoing electrical repairs. New upgrades remained a challenge, however, due to a lack of cash reserves and contract and procurement expertise, which meant Benghazi had to rely on Tripoli for further processing.

The Board found, however, that Washington showed a tendency to overemphasize the positive impact of physical security upgrades, which were often field-expedient improvements to a profoundly weak platform, while generally failing to meet Benghazi’s repeated requests to augment the numbers of TDY DS personnel. The insufficient Special Mission compound security platform was at variance with the appropriate Overseas Security Policy Board (OSPB) standards with respect to perimeter, interior security, and safe areas. Benghazi was also under-resourced with regard to certain needed security equipment.

Security Planning

Post and the Department were well aware of the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, although DS did not issue a worldwide caution cable to posts related to the anniversary. Ambassador Stevens and his DS agents had taken the anniversary into account by deciding to hold all meetings at the SMC that day rather than making any moves outside.

The Ambassador chose to travel to Benghazi that week, independent of Washington, as per standard practice. Timing for his trip was driven in part by commitments in Tripoli, as well as a staffing gap between principal officers in Benghazi. His trip had been put off earlier in the summer, and the September 10-14 dates were not decided upon well in advance. The Board found that plans for the Ambassador's trip provided for minimal close protection security support, and that Embassy country team members were not fully aware of planned movements off compound. The Ambassador did not see a direct threat of an attack of this nature and scale on the U.S. Mission in the overall negative trendline of security incidents from spring to summer 2012. His status as the leading U.S. government advocate on Libya policy, and his expertise on Benghazi in particular, caused Washington to give unusual deference to his judgments.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES ON SEPTEMBER 11-12, 2012

**3. Notwithstanding the proper implementation of security systems and procedures and remarkable heroism shown by American personnel, those systems themselves and the Libyan response fell short in the face of a series of attacks that began with the sudden penetration of the Special Mission compound by dozens of armed attackers.** In short, Americans in Benghazi and their Tripoli colleagues did their best with what they had, which, in the end, was not enough to prevent the loss of lives of Ambassador Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty. At the same time, U.S. security professionals prevented a further loss of life and helped ensure the safe evacuation of remaining American personnel in Benghazi 12 hours after the attacks began.

As noted in the preceding section, physical security at the Special Mission was insufficient. The SMC perimeter was breached immediately, providing no reaction time to the five DS agents on compound. There was no advance warning regarding the group of attackers approaching outside the SMC prior to the attack,

and no sign of them on surveillance cameras outside the C1 gate until the attack was underway. The Board learned that, as of the time of the attacks, the Special Mission compound had received additional surveillance cameras, which remained in boxes uninstalled, as technical support to install them had not yet visited post. In addition, the camera monitor in the local guard force booth next to the C1 gate was inoperable on the day of the attacks, a repair which also awaited the arrival of a technical team.

Some aspects of physical security upgrades did perform as intended – in particular, the safe area in Villa C, which prevented intruders from entering and the TOC door, which protected the DS agents from attackers trying to enter. Also, the installation of exits in the window grates of the Villa C safe area allowed ARSO 1 to escape the fire, and those exits were the entry point for him and other DS agents and Annex personnel to make multiple attempts to rescue and recover Sean Smith and Ambassador Stevens.

The Board found the responses by both BML and February 17 to be inadequate. No BML guards were present outside the compound immediately before the attack ensued, although perimeter security was one of their responsibilities, and there is conflicting information as to whether they sounded any alarms prior to fleeing the C1 gate area to other areas of the SMC. Although the unarmed BML guards could not be expected to repel an attack, they had core responsibility for providing early warning and controlling access to the compound, which they had not always performed well in the past. In the final analysis, the Board could not determine exactly how the C1 gate at the Special Mission compound was breached, but the speed with which attackers entered raised the possibility that BML guards left the C1 pedestrian gate open after initially seeing the attackers and fleeing the vicinity. They had left the gate unlatched before.

The Board's inquiry found little evidence that the armed February 17 guards alerted Americans at the SMC to the attack or summoned a February 17 militia presence to assist expeditiously once the attack was in progress – despite the fact that February 17 members were paid to provide interior security and a quick reaction force for the SMC and the fact that February 17 barracks were in the close vicinity, less than 2 km away from the SMC. A small number of February 17 militia members arrived at Villa C nearly an hour after the attack began. Although some February 17 members assisted in efforts to search for Ambassador Stevens in the smoke-filled Villa C building, the Board found little evidence that February 17

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contributed meaningfully to the defense of the Special Mission compound, or to the evacuation to the airport that took place on the morning of September 12.

In contrast, DS and Annex personnel on the ground in Benghazi performed with courage and an overriding desire to protect and rescue their colleagues, in a near impossible situation. The multiple trips that the DS agents and Annex security team members made into a burning, smoke-filled building in attempts to rescue Sean Smith and Ambassador Stevens showed readiness to risk life and limb to save others. They ultimately were unable to save Sean Smith and Ambassador Stevens, due to the intensity of the heat and smoke and a lack of resources, including breathing apparatus. The DS agents' decision to depart the SMC without the Ambassador came after they had all suffered smoke inhalation due to multiple rescue attempts, and amidst a renewed attack that continued as they departed the compound. The Board members believe every possible effort was made to protect, rescue, and recover Ambassador Stevens and Sean Smith, and that the bravery of the DS agents present in Benghazi helped prevent a further loss of life, particularly given their assistance in defending the Annex.

The Board found that the lack of non-lethal crowd control options also precluded a more vigorous defense of the SMC. The Board also determined that the lack of fire safety equipment severely impacted the Ambassador's and Sean Smith's ability to escape the deadly smoke conditions. On the other hand, the DS agents' tactical driving training, as well as their fully-armored vehicle, saved their lives when they were attacked by weapons fire en route from the SMC to the Annex. In addition, the DS emergency medical training and the DS-issued personal medical kit saved an ARSO's life after he was severely injured by a mortar attack at the Annex.

The Board found the Libyan government's response to be profoundly lacking on the night of the attacks, reflecting both weak capacity and a near total absence of central government influence in Benghazi. The Libyan government did facilitate assistance from a quasi-governmental militia that supported the evacuation of U.S. government personnel to Benghazi airport. It also facilitated the departure of the charter plane carrying the Tripoli rescue team to Benghazi, and provided a Libyan Air Force C-130 that was used to evacuate remaining personnel and the bodies of the deceased from Benghazi on the morning of September 12.

Washington-Tripoli-Benghazi communication, cooperation, and coordination on the night of the attacks were effective, despite multiple channels of

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communication among Washington, Tripoli, Benghazi, and AFRICOM headquarters in Stuttgart, as well as multiple channels of communication within Washington itself. Embassy Tripoli served as a lifeline to Benghazi throughout the attacks, marshalling support from Washington, Stuttgart and elsewhere, including quickly organizing the charter plane that sent the seven-person reinforcement team to Benghazi. At the direction of AFRICOM, DoD moved a remotely piloted, unarmed surveillance aircraft to Benghazi, which arrived over the SMC shortly before the DS team departed. A second remotely piloted, unarmed surveillance aircraft relieved the first, and monitored the eventual evacuation of personnel from the Annex to Benghazi airport later on the morning of September 12.

Embassy Tripoli staff showed absolute dedication and teamwork in mobilizing to respond to the crisis, with the DCM, DATT, Political, and other country team sections reaching out to a wide range of contacts in Tripoli and Benghazi to secure support; the Public Affairs team monitoring social media sites and recording a log of Mission calls; the Embassy nurse providing invaluable guidance on caring for the wounded evacuated from Benghazi; and a Consular officer donating blood that helped save the life of a wounded colleague. Throughout the crisis, the Acting NEA Assistant Secretary provided crucial leadership guidance to Embassy Tripoli's DCM, and Embassy Tripoli's RSO offered valuable counsel to the DS agents in Benghazi.

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. In addition, at the State Department's request, the Department of Defense also provided a Marine FAST (Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team) as additional security support for Embassy Tripoli on September 12.

Overall, communication systems on the night of the attacks worked, with a near-constant information flow among Benghazi, Tripoli, and Washington. Cell phones were the main method of contact, but lacked redundancy. Radio

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communications between the Annex and the SMC also worked well, thanks to prior coordination between the two.

Shortly after receiving the initial notification from Embassy Tripoli at approximately 1545 EST, the State Department Operations Center notified the interagency, including the White House, of the Special Mission attack by secure conference call and email alerts. The Operations Center and the Diplomatic Security Command Center (DSCC) were exemplary in eliciting information from Tripoli- and Benghazi-based colleagues without overloading them.

*IMPACT OF INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION AVAILABILITY*

**4. The Board found that intelligence provided no immediate, specific tactical warning of the September 11 attacks. Known gaps existed in the intelligence community's understanding of extremist militias in Libya and the potential threat they posed to U.S. interests, although some threats were known to exist.**

Terrorist networks are difficult to monitor, and the Board emphasizes the conclusion of previous accountability review boards that vulnerable missions cannot rely on receiving specific warning intelligence. Similarly, the lack of specific threat intelligence does not imply a lessening of probability of a terrorist attack. The Board found that there was a tendency on the part of policy, security and other U.S. government officials to rely heavily on the probability of warning intelligence and on the absence of specific threat information. The result was possibly to overlook the usefulness of taking a hard look at accumulated, sometimes circumstantial information, and instead to fail to appreciate threats and understand trends, particularly based on increased violence and the targeting of foreign diplomats and international organizations in Benghazi. The latter information failed to come into clear relief against a backdrop of the lack of effective governance, widespread and growing political violence and instability and the ready availability of weapons in eastern Libya. There were U.S. assessments that provided situational awareness on the persistent, general threat to U.S. and Western interests in eastern Libya, including Benghazi. Board members, however, were struck by the lack of discussion focused specifically on Benghazi.

Benghazi's threat environment had been generally deteriorating since the "gelatina" bomb was thrown over the SMC fence on April 6, but was not judged to have reached a critical point before September 11. The July 7 elections, about

which there had been some trepidation regarding the security situation, passed with less violence than expected and were followed by Ramadan, when incidents are usually lower. Before September 11, a patchwork of militias in Benghazi had assumed many, if not all, of the security functions normally associated with central government organs, as the government had little authority or reach in Benghazi. There seemed to be no attempt, however, to link formally the many anti-Western incidents in Benghazi, the general declarations of threat in U.S. assessments and a proliferation of violence-prone and little understood militias, the lack of any central authority and a general perception of a deteriorating security environment to any more specific and timely analysis of the threat to U.S. government facilities.

Board members found that there was little understanding of militias in Benghazi and the threat they posed to U.S. interests. One prime factor behind this knowledge gap was that eastern Libya is home to many militias, which are constantly dissolving, splitting apart and reforming. Furthermore, many individuals are associated with more than one militia. Understanding of February 17, in particular, was further limited by the fact that it is an umbrella organization, made up of many different militias with differing ideologies, some of which are extremist in nature.

The Board determined there were no warnings from Libyan interlocutors.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF PERSONNEL

- 5. The Board found that certain senior State Department officials within two bureaus in critical positions of authority and responsibility in Washington demonstrated a lack of proactive leadership and management ability** appropriate for the State Department's senior ranks in their responses to security concerns posed by Special Mission Benghazi, given the deteriorating threat environment and the lack of reliable host government protection. However, the Board did not find that any individual U.S. Government employee engaged in misconduct or willfully ignored his or her responsibilities, and, therefore did not find reasonable cause to believe that an individual breached his or her duty so as to be the subject of a recommendation for disciplinary action.