Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2012

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
2291 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear President Obama and Secretary Clinton:

We, the undersigned members of Congress, write to express our continuing concerns regarding the catastrophic terrorist attack on September 11 at the U.S. compound in Benghazi that claimed the lives of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, Foreign Service Officer Sean Smith, and U.S. security officers Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods. We welcome Secretary Clinton's commitment to cooperate fully and expeditiously with Congress towards a full and accurate accounting of the Benghazi attacks and the implementation of appropriate measures to prevent such attacks on our embassies and our diplomatic personnel from happening again. Further, we appreciate the Department of State's willingness to make witnesses available to testify at the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform's October 10 hearing, "The Security Failures of Benghazi." We view this hearing and other congressional efforts as only the beginning of Congress' exercise of its oversight responsibilities regarding the Benghazi attack and embassy security. Thus, we request a full and immediate response to the following oversight questions.

Prior Attacks in Libya and Reduction of U.S. Security Personnel in Benghazi

In a July 9 cable, Ambassador Stevens requested continued temporary duty (TDY) assignment security support through mid-September, stating, "Conditions in Libya have not met prior benchmarks established by Post, the Department [of State], and AFRICOM, for a complete drawdown of TDY security personnel." Further, in an August 2 cable, Ambassador Stevens warned that "[t]he security condition in Libya remains unpredictable, volatile, and violent," and that "host nation security support is lacking and cannot be depended on to provide a safe and secure environment" for U.S. personnel. In fact, according to a detailed report from the U.S. Embassy in Libya's Regional Security Office, there were more than 230 security incidents in Libya, including no fewer than 48 security incidents in Benghazi, from June 2011 to July 2012. These security incidents included attacks by militias and terror groups that grew in their sophistication and coordination, including two bombings of the U.S. compound in Benghazi. On April 6, a bomb was thrown over the wall of the U.S. compound in Benghazi, causing some damage to an interior wall. The attackers were a contract guard and a former contract guard who had been recently dismissed for gross misconduct, specifically, for putting graffiti on U.S. government property. On June 6, an attacker placed a bomb on the ledge of the compound's

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perimeter wall, creating a large crater in the perimeter wall that was described as "big enough for 40 men to go through." What role did Ambassador Stevens' assessment of the security environment in Libya, the large number of security incidents, and their increase in sophistication and coordination play in the Department of State's security decisions with respect to the U.S. compound in Benghazi? When was President Obama made aware of these two attacks on the Benghazi compound? Were these two attacks included in the President's Daily Brief immediately after the attacks took place?

Additionally, on May 22, RPG rounds were launched at the Benghazi office of the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC), approximately one kilometer from the U.S. compound in Benghazi. The Imprisoned Sheikh Omar Abdul-Rahman Brigades, a pro-al Qaeda group, claimed credit for the attack and said, "Finally, now we are preparing a message for the Americans for disturbing the skies over Derna." On June 11, a three-car convoy carrying the British Ambassador to Libya was attacked by RPG and AK-47 fire, injuring two security personnel in the lead armored vehicle. This attack occurred within 500 meters of the rear entrance to the British compound and approximately two kilometers from the U.S. compound. Following these attacks, the ICRC and the British both pulled out of Benghazi. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Andrew Wood, former head of the Department of Defense Security Support Team (SST) in Libya comprising 16 Special Forces personnel, testified on October 10 that it was apparent to him that following these pullouts, the U.S. compound was "the last flag flying in Benghazi" and the last item on the target list, and voiced these concerns at a country meeting. In spite of this, the request to renew the SST deployment in Benghazi was still denied. How did the ICRC and British withdrawals from Benghazi factor into security-related decisions including the denial of SST renewal and the decision of whether it was safe for U.S. personnel, the last highly visible Western presence, to remain in Benghazi?

In spite of the attacks prior to September 11 mentioned above, as well as other statements regarding the security situation in Benghazi provided in detailed cables from the U.S. Embassy in Libya to Department of State officials in Washington, DC, Charlene Lamb, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Programs, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, at the Department of State, testified on October 10, "We had the correct number of assets in Benghazi at the time of 9/11 for what had been agreed upon." Did the Benghazi compound have adequate security on September 11?

Designation of U.S. Compound in Benghazi and Security Requirements

The U.S. compound in Benghazi has been described as an embassy, as a consulate, as a mission, and as a compound (the generic term used in this letter). What was the Department of State's designation for the Benghazi compound and how did this designation affect security requirements? Was the compound designated as temporary or interim? What effect did this designation have on security requirements?

The Approach to Security Requirements at Benghazi

LTC Wood testified on October 10 that the Department of State applied a "cookie cutter" approach to the security of the U.S. compound in Benghazi. Were the security requirements

developed with sensitivity to the security environment of Benghazi? Were these requirements waived and, if so, why?

With respect to the more than 230 security incidents in Libya mentioned above, Regional Security Officer (RSO) Eric Nordstrom wrote in an October 1 e-mail, "These incidents paint a clear picture that the environment in Libya was fragile at best and could degrade quickly. Certainly, [sic] not an environment where post should be directed to 'normalize' operations and reduce security resources in accordance with an artificial time table." How did the Department of State formulate its directions for normalization in Libya and the reduction of security personnel, and did such directions take into account Libya's security environment as described by U.S. personnel on the ground?

Loss of Effectiveness Due to Withdrawal of U.S. Security Personnel

As discussed above, in July, Ambassador Stevens requested additional U.S. security personnel, either SST or Department of State Diplomatic Security (DS) agents, or a combination thereof. This request was denied. LTC Wood testified of the "genius" behind the SST because it brought together all elements of government power to protect the embassy, including military and diplomatic power, "the expertise of some of the finest quality soldiers in the world," and the resources of the Special Operations Command, Africa (SOCAFRICA) and the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), including intelligence and other capabilities. However, the State Department both denied this valuable asset to personnel stationed in Benghazi and sought to "backfill" their skill set with local Libyan militia forces. What would have been the qualitative difference in effectiveness between staffing the Benghazi compound with SST or DS agents as requested versus using local militias? Is it reasonable to believe that additional U.S. security personnel, whether SST or DS, could have made it possible for Ambassador Stevens, Smith, Doherty, and Woods to escape with their lives?

Official Responsibility for Benghazi Situation

On October 15, Secretary Clinton said, "I take responsibility" for the Benghazi situation and "the president and the vice president wouldn't be knowledgeable about specific decisions that are made by security professionals." However, the next day, President Obama said, "I am ultimately responsible for what's taking place there" and "[Secretary Clinton] works for me. I'm the president and I am always responsible." Please name these "security professionals" and describe the responsibilities for embassy security as it applies to the Benghazi situation with respect to President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and these "security professionals."

Deputy Assistant Secretary Lamb testified on October 10 that she lacked the sole discretion to deny RSO Nordstrom's request for additional manpower in Benghazi. She stated that the response cable would be approved by two senior officials, Scott Bultrowicz, the Director of the Diplomatic Security Service, and Eric Boswell, the Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security. RSO Nordstrom testified that Bureau of Diplomatic Security Regional Director Jim Bacigalupo was also involved in this decision. Please describe the roles that these named individuals played in making decisions involving the requests for added security in Benghazi, and if other officials were involved, please name them as well and describe their roles.

Conflicting Administration Statements Regarding Benghazi Attack as "Terrorist Attack"

On October 16, President Obama claimed that he had clearly called the Benghazi attack an "act of terror" in his speech in the Rose Garden the day after the attack, when he said "no acts of terror will ever shake the resolve of this great nation." However, for the next two weeks after the attack, administration officials repeatedly refused to call the Benghazi attack a terrorist attack and claimed that it arose out of a spontaneous, unplanned protest of a movie in front of the U.S. compound in Benghazi, a protest which never took place. For example, on September 14, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said, "We don't have and did not have concrete evidence to suggest that this was not in reaction to the film." On September 16, Susan Rice, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., made multiple television appearances stating, "Our current best assessment, based on the information that we have at present, is that, in fact, what this began as, it was a spontaneous — not a premeditated — response to what had transpired in Cairo." On September 20, Press Secretary Carney agreed with reporters that the White House had never called the Benghazi attack an "act of terrorism" or a "terrorist attack." Please explain these contradictions as to the administration's characterization of the Benghazi attack as a deliberate, terrorist attack or a spontaneous protest in its public statements, as well as the decision making process for approving such statements.

Increase in Danger Pay for U.S. Mission in Libya

Prior to the September 11 attack, the Department of State granted an increase in danger pay for the entire U.S. Mission in Libya at the same time that it denied its requests for additional security in Benghazi. Obviously the increase in danger pay is an implicit recognition of heightened danger, and yet additional resources were not allocated to match this increase in danger with an increase in protective measures. As Deputy Assistant Secretary Lamb testified on October 10, budget considerations played no part in her decision to deny the request for additional security in Benghazi. Please explain the discrepancy between the danger pay increase and the denial for additional security.

Future Steps for Improvement in Embassy Security

What steps has the Department of State taken to reassess its security posture at other vulnerable, high-risk embassies in the region and elsewhere, in light of the Benghazi attack and other recent incidents, and to implement improvements in protective measures? Please describe whether such practices are sufficiently responsive and flexible to keep pace with rapidly changing security environments and escalations in danger to embassies and personnel.

Thank you for your consideration of the above questions and we look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

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