

**SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity.

The terrorist attacks in Benghazi on September 11, 2012 that claimed the lives of four brave Americans -- Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty -- are part of a broader strategic challenge to the United States and our partners in North Africa. Today, I want to offer some context for this challenge and share what we've learned, how we are protecting our people, and where we can work together to honor our fallen colleagues and continue to champion America's interests and values.

Any clear-eyed examination of this matter must begin with this sobering fact: Since 1988, there have been 19 Accountability Review Boards investigating attacks on American diplomats and their facilities. Benghazi joins a long list of tragedies, for our Department and for other agencies: hostages taken in Tehran in 1979, our embassy and Marine barracks bombed in Beirut in 1983, Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, our embassies in East Africa in 1998, consulate staff murdered in Jeddah in 2004, the Khost attack in 2009, and too many others.

Of course, the list of attacks foiled, crises averted, and lives saved is even longer. We should never forget that our security professionals get it right 99 percent of the time, against difficult odds all over the world. That's why, like my predecessors, I trust them with my life.

Let's also remember that administrations of both parties, in partnership with Congress, have made concerted and good faith efforts to learn from the tragedies that have occurred, to implement recommendations from the Review Boards, to seek necessary resources, and to better protect our people from constantly evolving threats. That's what the men and women who serve our country deserve. And it's what we are doing again now, with your help. As Secretary, I have had no higher priority, and no greater responsibility.

As I have said many times since September 11, I take responsibility. Nobody is more committed to getting this right. I am determined to leave the State Department and our country safer, stronger, and more secure.

Taking responsibility meant moving quickly in those first uncertain hours and days to respond to the immediate crisis and further protect our people and posts in high-threat areas across the region and the world. It meant launching an independent investigation to determine exactly what happened in Benghazi and to recommend steps for improvement. And it meant intensifying our efforts to combat terrorism and support emerging democracies in North Africa and beyond.

Let me share some of the lessons we have learned, the steps we have taken, and the work we continue to do.

First, let's start on the night of September 11 itself and those difficult early days. I directed our response from the State Department and stayed in close contact with officials from across our government and the Libyan government. So I saw first-hand what Ambassador Thomas Pickering and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen called "timely" and "exceptional" coordination. No delays in decision-making. No denials of

support from Washington or from the military. And I want to echo the Review Board's praise for the valor and courage of our people on the ground – especially the security professionals in Benghazi and Tripoli. The Board said our response saved American lives in real time – and it did.

The very next morning, I told the American people that “heavily armed militants assaulted our compound” and vowed to bring them to justice. And I stood with President Obama as he spoke of “an act of terror.”

You may recall that in that same period, we also saw violent attacks on our embassies in Cairo, Sanaa, Tunis, and Khartoum, as well as large protests outside many other posts where thousands of our diplomats serve.

So I immediately ordered a review of our security posture around the world, with particular scrutiny for high-threat posts. We asked the Department of Defense to join Interagency Security Assessment Teams and to dispatch hundreds of additional Marine Security Guards. I named the first Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for High Threat Posts, so Missions in dangerous places get the attention they need. And we reached out to Congress to help address physical vulnerabilities, including risks from fire, and to hire additional Diplomatic Security personnel.

Second, even as we took these steps, I also appointed the Accountability Review Board led by Ambassador Pickering and Admiral Mullen so that we could more fully understand what went wrong and how to fix it.

I have accepted every one of their recommendations -- and I asked the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources to lead a task force to ensure that all 29 of them are implemented quickly and completely... as well as to pursue additional steps above and beyond those in the Board's report.

Because of the effort we began in the days after the attacks, work is already well underway. And, as I pledged in my letter to you last month, implementation has now begun on all 29 recommendations. Our task force started by translating the recommendations into 64 specific action items. All of these action items were assigned to specific bureaus and offices, with clear timelines for completion. Fully 85 percent are on track to be completed by the end of March, with a number completed already.

We are taking a top-to-bottom look, and rethinking how we make decisions on where, when, and how our people operate in high threat areas, and how we respond to threats and crises.

As part of our effort to go above and beyond the Review Board's recommendations, we are initiating an annual High Threat Post Review chaired by the Secretary of State, and ongoing reviews by the Deputy Secretaries, to ensure pivotal questions about security reach the highest levels. And we will regularize protocols for sharing information with Congress.

All of these actions are designed to increase the safety of our diplomats and development experts and reduce the chances of another Benghazi happening again.

Now, in addition to the immediate action we took and the Review Board process, we have been moving forward on a third front: addressing the broader strategic challenge in North Africa and the wider region.

Because Benghazi didn't happen in a vacuum. The Arab revolutions have scrambled power dynamics and shattered security forces across the region. And instability in Mali has created an expanding safe haven for terrorists who look to extend their influence and plot further attacks of the kind we saw just last week in Algeria.

And let me offer my deepest condolences to the families of the Americans and all the people from many nations who were killed and injured in the recent hostage crisis. We remain in close touch with the Government of Algeria and stand ready to provide assistance if needed. We are seeking to gain a fuller understanding of what took place so that we can work together to prevent terrorist attacks like this in the future.

Concerns about terrorism and instability in North Africa are not new. Indeed they have been a top priority for our entire national security team. But after Benghazi, we accelerated a diplomatic campaign to increase pressure on al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other terrorist groups across the region.

In the first hours and days, I conferred with the President of Libya and the Foreign Ministers of Tunisia and Morocco. Two weeks later, I met with regional leaders at the United Nations General Assembly and held a special meeting focused on Mali and the Sahel. In October, I flew to Algeria to discuss the fight against AQIM. In November, I sent Deputy Secretary Bill Burns to follow up in Algiers. And then in December, he co-chaired the Global Counterterrorism Forum in Abu Dhabi and a meeting in Tunis of leaders working to build new democracies and reform security services.

In all these diplomatic engagements, and in near-constant contacts at every level, we have focused on targeting al Qaeda's syndicate of terror – closing safe havens, cutting off finances, countering extremist ideology, and slowing the flow of new recruits. We continue to hunt the terrorists responsible for the attacks in Benghazi and are determined to bring them to justice. And we're also using all our diplomatic and economic tools to support the emerging democracies of the region, including Libya, to strengthen security forces and provide a path away from extremism.

The United States must continue to lead... in the Middle East and all around the globe. We have come a long way in the past four years. We cannot afford to retreat now. When America is absent, especially from unstable environments, there are consequences. Extremism takes root, our interests suffer, and our security at home is threatened.

That's why Chris Stevens went to Benghazi in the first place. Nobody knew the dangers better than Chris, first during the revolution and then during the transition. A weak Libyan government, marauding militias, even terrorist groups... a bomb exploded in the parking lot of his hotel, but he didn't waver. Because he understood that it was critical for America to be represented in that pivotal place at that pivotal time.

Our men and women who serve overseas understand that we accept a level of risk to protect this country we love. They represent the best traditions of a bold and generous nation. And they cannot work in bunkers and do their jobs.

It is our responsibility to make sure they have the resources they need to do their jobs and to do everything we can to reduce the risks they face.

For me, this is not just a matter of policy... it's personal.

I stood next to President Obama as the Marines carried those flag-draped caskets off the plane at Andrews. I put my arms around the mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters.

It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to lead the men and women of the State Department and USAID. Nearly 70,000 serving here in Washington and at more than 275 posts around the world. They get up and go to work every day – often in difficult and dangerous circumstances thousands of miles from home – because they believe the United States is the most extraordinary force for peace and progress the earth has ever known.

And when we suffer tragedies overseas, the number of Americans applying to the Foreign Service actually increases. That tells us everything we need to know about what kind of patriots I'm talking about. They ask what they can do for their country. And America is stronger for it.

Today, after four years in this job, after traveling nearly 1 million miles and visiting 112 countries around the world, my faith in our country and our future is stronger than ever. Every time that blue and white airplane carrying the words "United States of America" touches down in some far-off capital, I feel again the honor it is to represent the world's indispensable nation. And I am confident that, with your help, we will continue to keep the United States safe, strong, and exceptional.

So I want to thank this committee for your partnership and your support of our diplomats and development experts around the world. You know the importance of the work they do day-in and day-out, and that America's values and vital national security interests are at stake. It is absolutely critical that we work together to ensure they have the resources and support they need to face increasingly complex threats.

I know that you share our sense of responsibility and urgency. And while we all may not agree on everything, let's stay focused on what really matters: protecting our people and the country we all love.

Now I am now happy to answer your questions.

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