

STATEMENT OF
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE WILLIAM J. BURNS
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC
DECEMBER 20, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity. Secretary Clinton asked me to express how much she regrets not being able to be here today.

Since the terrorist attacks on our compounds in Benghazi, State Department officials and senior members from other agencies have testified in four Congressional hearings, provided more than 20 briefings for Members and staff, and submitted thousands of pages of documents – including now the full classified report of the Accountability Review Board. Secretary Clinton has also sent a letter covering a wide range of issues for the record. So today, I would like to highlight just a few key points.

The attacks in Benghazi took the lives of four courageous Americans. Ambassador Stevens was a friend and a beloved member of the State Department community for twenty years. He was a diplomat's diplomat, and he embodied the best of America.

Even as we grieved for our fallen friends and colleagues, we took action on three fronts:

First, we took immediate steps to further protect our people and posts. We stayed in constant contact with embassies and consulates around the world facing large protests, dispatched emergency security teams, received reporting from the intelligence community, and took additional precautions where needed. You'll hear more about all this from my partner Tom Nides.

Second, we intensified a diplomatic campaign aimed at combating the threat of terrorism across North Africa. We continue to work to bring to justice the terrorists responsible for the attacks in Benghazi. And we are working with our partners to close safe havens, cut off terrorist finances, counter extremist ideology, and slow the flow of new recruits.

And third, Secretary Clinton ordered an investigation to determine exactly what happened in Benghazi. I want to convey our appreciation to the Accountability Review Board's chairman and vice-chairman, Ambassador Thomas Pickering and Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen. And also Hugh Turner, Richard Shinnick, and Catherine Bertini.

The Board's report takes a clear-eyed look at serious, systemic problems. Problems which are unacceptable. Problems for which – as Secretary Clinton has said -- we take responsibility. And problems which we have already begun to fix.

Before Tom walks you through what we're doing to implement fully all of the Board's recommendations, I'd like to add a few words based on my own experiences as a career diplomat in the field. I have been a very proud member of the Foreign Service for more than thirty years, and have had the honor of serving as a Chief of Mission overseas.

I know that diplomacy, by its very nature, must sometimes be practiced in dangerous places. As Secretary Clinton has said, our diplomats cannot work in bunkers and do their jobs. When America is absent, there are consequences. Our interests suffer, and our security at home is threatened.

Chris Stevens understood that as well as anyone. Chris also knew that every Chief of Mission has the responsibility to ensure the best possible security and support for our people. As senior officials here in Washington, we share that profound responsibility. We have to constantly improve, reduce the risks our people face, and make sure they have the resources they need.

That includes the men and women of the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service. I have been deeply honored to serve with many of these brave men and women. They are professionals and patriots who serve in many places where there are no Marines on post and little or no U.S. military presence in country. Like Secretary Clinton, I trust them with my life.

It's important to recognize that our colleagues in the Bureaus of Diplomatic Security and Near East Affairs and across the Department, at home and abroad, get it right countless times a day, for years on end, in some of the toughest circumstances imaginable. We cannot lose sight of that.

But we learned some very hard and painful lessons in Benghazi. We are already acting on them. We have to do better.

We owe it to our colleagues who lost their lives in Benghazi. We owe it to the security professionals who acted with such extraordinary heroism that awful night to try to protect them. And we owe it to thousands of our colleagues serving America with great dedication every day in diplomatic posts around the world.

We will never prevent every act of terrorism or achieve perfect security – but we will never stop working to get better and safer. As Secretary Clinton has said, the United States will keep leading and keep engaging around the world, including in those hard places where America’s interests and values are at stake.

Thank you.

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