

27 February 2013

Hon. John Boehner  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Eric Cantor  
Majority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C. 20515

Hon. Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Congressional Leaders:

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the as-yet-unexplained failure of the U.S. military to respond to the terrorist attack on the so-called “Special Mission Compound” and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya on the night of September 11, 2012. As you know, this incident involved the first assassination of a US ambassador in over thirty years and constituted the most egregious attack on American diplomats since the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

Yet, the focus of most after-action assessments and congressional testimony has, to date, centered more on altered talking points provided by the CIA and why Secretary Clinton and others ignored warnings from Ambassador Stevens regarding the deteriorating security situation in Benghazi. Relatively little light has been shed on the details of the decision-making process that resulted in the loss of four Americans without any real-time effort being made to bring forces to bear to protect our countrymen and secure their corpses.

In our professional judgment, a fundamental American precept was ignored during the Benghazi attack: We strive to ensure that our comrades never fall into enemy hands and that the fallen are not left behind. This honor-bound commitment was captured in a memorable letter to Major General Ulysses S. Grant on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman wrote, “ I knew wherever I was that you thought of me and that if I got in a tight spot, you would come – if alive.”

Sherman’s sentiment is one that has been central to the character of our nation and its military throughout our history. To cite but one example: The 1993 “Blackhawk Down” event in Mogadishu, Somalia was an eighteen-hour fight over the bodies of two Americans who were killed in a helicopter crash. Similarly, our nation has been engaged in a decades-long effort to locate dead and missing Americans lost in Southeast Asia

during the Vietnam conflict. Preserving this critical ethos is a matter of fulfilling the pledge that we make to those we send into harm's way when required by our national interest and security.

Instead, we have had a series of unconvincing excuses for official inaction. Defense Secretary Panetta blamed the paucity of intelligence at the time. The Joint Chiefs Chairman, General Martin Dempsey, has said no forces could be brought to bear in time. It is difficult to square these two claims: If there were little intelligence from the scene of the attack, how could military commanders determine the intentions of the attackers – or the length of time that it would take them to overrun the Special Mission Compound, kill Ambassador Stevens and assault the CIA Annex? Equally germane is the question of why there was no effort to protect the bodies of our fallen personnel and to prevent them from falling under Libyan control, including that of their murderers.

For its part, the State Department's protracted Accountability Review Board (ARB) also failed adequately to address the lack of a military response. Perhaps that was the predictable result of the lack of actual independence it had, given the longstanding institutional ties and loyalties of its co-chairmen.

The absence of the necessary accountability is all the more distressing in light of the very considerable and potentially relevant military capabilities of which we are aware, including:

- A) The U.S. Army created the Delta Force in 1977 to respond globally to terrorist attacks, including those similar to the Benghazi attack.
- B) SEAL Team Six was created in 1980 to provide a global maritime counterpart to the Delta Force.
- C) CINC In-Extremis Forces were created after passage of the Nunn-Cohen amendment to the Defense Authorization in 1986. (Nunn-Cohen authorized the creation of the U.S. Special Operations Command.) These forces were strategically positioned to provide rescue capabilities for all theaters.
- D) The Marines maintain Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Teams (FAST) in forward locations. It is probable that one of the FAST elements was located in Rota, Spain or Sigonella, Italy at the time of the attack in Benghazi.

As to the lack of detailed intelligence precluding the use of such forces, special operations and other counterterrorist forces often have to operate without detailed situational awareness – *and are trained to do so* – as their mission is to save lives. Consequently, they are accustomed to accepting greater risk than conventional units, and do so willingly.

In addition, the Navy and Air Force generally have aviation assets that almost certainly could have been brought to bear – at a minimum as a show of force – early in this seven-hour-long series of attacks.

In short, the rationales provided to date for the abject failure to come to the help of Americans under fire simply do not withstand even the sort of scrutiny possible with open-source material. We believe that would fare even worse if examined closely by those with access to all-source classified information.

Mr. Speaker, a full accounting of the events of September 11, 2012 is critical for various reasons. Not least, what message does this debacle send to other diplomats or military personnel who may be deployed today or in the future into hazardous areas? We must get to the bottom of whatever prevented the U.S. military from attempting a rescue and ensure that, whether it was a matter of inadequate military readiness or resources, dysfunctional interactions between various elements of the executive branch or other reasons, we take steps to ensure that this monumental failure is not repeated in the future.

It seems clear that the current congressional committee structure is inadequate to undertake the necessary accounting that cuts across the various command structures, operational responsibilities and the conduct of numerous agencies, both civilian and military. Indeed, the multiple standing House and Senate committees with their stove-piped jurisdictions have actually *impeded* the needed, comprehensive determination of the facts.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you immediately take steps to establish a bicameral investigative committee with subpoena and deposition powers and with the requisite staff needed to conduct such hearings as are necessary to prepare a *truly* authoritative and independent report as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Hon. Allen West  
Andrew C. McCarthy  
Frank J. Gaffney, Jr.  
Hon. Thomas O'Connell  
Hon. Henry Cooper  
Hon. Sue Myrick  
Ginni Thomas  
Carole L. Dowd

Lieutenant General William G. Boykin, USA (Ret.)  
Hon. Kenneth Blackwell  
Admiral James A. Lyons, USN (Ret.)  
Dan Bongino  
Hon. Jim Nicholson  
John M. Dowd  
Major General Paul E. Vallely, USA (Ret.)