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DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
CHARLENE LAMB
TESTIMONY BEFORE HOUSE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2012

Chairman Issa, Ranking Member Cummings, members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Charlene Lamb. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Programs in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security at the Department of State, I'm responsible for the safety and security of more than 275 diplomatic facilities.

I've been in law enforcement for 35 years, starting as a uniformed police officer in Orange, California. Twenty-five of those years have been with the State Department, including 17 consecutive years stationed abroad as a Regional Security Officer in Nicaragua, Tanzania, Kuwait, Guatemala, and Germany.

I'm here today to share our best information to date about what happened in Benghazi on September 11th, and to have a constructive discussion with the committee about how we can best work together to prevent such tragedies in the future.

As you know, there is an on-going investigation being conducted by the FBI and we are speaking today with an incomplete picture. As a result, our answers today will also be incomplete. But as this process moves forward and more information becomes available, we will continue to engage closely with Congress.

State Department staff first moved into the facility in Benghazi in mid-2011. Let me begin by describing the actual compound. It is more than 300 yards long and nearly 100 yards wide.

The main building was divided into two sections. A public section included common areas and meeting space. The second section was a residential area that included the safe haven. A second building –Building B – housed Diplomatic Security agents. The Tactical Operations Center (or TOC) occupied a third building. It contained communications equipment, and a warning system. The fourth building on the compound, the one closest to the gate, served as the barracks for members of the Libyan 17th February Brigade who were on the compound round the clock.

After acquiring the compound, we made a number of security upgrades. To strengthen the compound's perimeter, we extended the height of the outer wall with masonry concrete. Then we added barbed wire and concertina razor wire to further extend the height of the wall to 12 feet. We increased the external lighting and erected Jersey Barriers –large concrete blocks – outside the perimeter to provide anti-ram protection. Inside each of the three steel gates, we installed steel drop bars to control vehicle traffic.

Inside the perimeter of the wall, we also added equipment to detect explosives, as well as an Imminent Danger Notification System. We hardened wooden doors with steel and reinforced locks. And we installed security grills on windows accessible from the ground. This included escape windows with emergency releases.

We also built guard booths and sandbag emplacements to create defensive positions inside the compound.

In terms of armed security personnel, there were five Diplomatic Security agents on the Compound on September 11th. There were also three members of the Libyan 17th February Brigade. In addition, stationed nearby by at the embassy annex was a well-trained U.S. quick reaction security team.

All of these measures and upgrades were taken in coordination with security officials in Benghazi, Tripoli, and Washington.

Let me underscore this point and provide some context. As I said, I work closely with 275 diplomatic facilities around the world. Determining the right level of security for each one is an intensive, ongoing, constantly evolving process -- one that I appreciate and understand from my own time on the ground as a Diplomatic Security officer.

We consult regularly with our people on the ground, with security professionals in Washington, and with the intelligence community. We use the most up-to-date information available.

Together with the Regional Security Officer, we develop a comprehensive security plan, which we constantly revise and update as situations change. It is important to understand this as we continue the conversation today.

That brings me to the events of September 11 itself. The account I am about to present is based on first-hand reports from several security personnel present that night. Additionally, I was in our Diplomatic Security Command Center monitoring multiple open lines with our agents for much of the attack.

The attack began at approximately 9:40 pm local time. Diplomatic Security agents inside the compound heard loud voices outside the walls, followed by gunfire and an explosion. Dozens of attackers then launched a full-scale assault that was unprecedented in its size and intensity. They forced their way through the pedestrian gate, and used diesel fuel to set fire to the Libyan 17th February Brigade members' barracks, and then proceeded towards the main building.

Let me add here that over the course of the attack, two local Libyan security personnel were beaten, and two were shot. We should not lose sight of their service.

When the attack began, a Diplomatic Security agent working in the Tactical Operations Center immediately activated the Imminent Danger Notification System and made an emergency announcement over the PA. Based on our security protocols, he also alerted the annex U.S. quick reaction security team stationed nearby, the Libyan 17th February Brigade, Embassy Tripoli, and the Diplomatic Security Command Center in Washington. From that point on, I could follow what was happening in almost real-time.

Gunfire was heard from multiple locations on the compound. One agent secured Ambassador Stevens and Sean Smith, the information management officer, in the safe haven. The other agents retrieved their M4 submachine guns and other tactical gear from Building B. When they attempted to return to the main building, they encountered armed attackers and doubled back to Building B.

The attackers used diesel fuel to set the main building ablaze. Thick smoke filled the entire structure. The Diplomatic Security agent began leading the Ambassador and Sean Smith through the debilitating smoke toward the emergency escape window.

The agent, nearing unconsciousness himself, opened the window and crawled out. He then realized they had become separated in the smoke. So he reentered the building and searched multiple times for the Ambassador and Mr. Smith. Finally the agent—suffering from severe smoke inhalation and barely able to breathe or speak – exited to the roof and notified the Tactical Operations Center of the situation.

At the same time, attackers swept across the compound towards the Tactical Operations Center and Building B. They broke into Building B, ravaging it, but did not reach the two agents inside. They attempted to break into the Tactical Operations Center again and again but were not able to breach the facility.

Determined to reach the main building, three agents regrouped, made their way to a near-by armored vehicle, and then drove over to assist the agent on the roof and to search for the Ambassador and Mr. Smith.

Despite thick smoke, the agents entered the building multiple times trying to locate the Ambassador and Mr. Smith. After numerous attempts, they found Sean Smith and, with the assistance of a member of the U.S. quick reaction security team, removed him from the building. Unfortunately, he was already deceased. They still could not find the Ambassador.

The annex U reaction security team arrived with approximately 40 members of the Libyan 17th February Brigade. They encountered heavy resistance as they approached the compound. Together with the Diplomatic Security agents, they helped secure the area around the main building and continued the search for the Ambassador—again making several trips into the building at their own peril.

At 11pm, members of the Libyan 17th February Brigade advised they could no longer hold the area around the main building and insisted on evacuating the site. The agents made a final search for the Ambassador before leaving in an armored vehicle.

They took heavy fire as they pulled away from the main building and on the street outside the compound. Two tires were blown out and the bullet-resistant glass shattered but remained intact. Upon arriving at the annex around midnight, they took up defensive positions, including on the roof. Shortly after their arrival, the annex itself began taking intermittent fire for a period of time.

In the early morning, an additional security team arrived from Tripoli and proceeded to the annex. Shortly after they arrived, the annex started taking mortar fire, with as many as three direct hits on the compound. It was during this mortar attack that Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty were killed and a Diplomatic Security agent and an annex quick reaction security team member were critically wounded.

A large number of Libyan government security officers subsequently arrived in more than 50 vehicles and escorted the remaining Americans to the airport.

While still at the airport, we were able to confirm reports that the Ambassador's body was at the Benghazi General Hospital. The Department coordinated the transfer of his remains to the

airport. All US government personnel, including those injured and killed in action, were then flown from Benghazi to Tripoli.

Before I close, I would like to echo what Under Secretary Kennedy said: The men and women who risk their lives in the service of our country are heroes. I know and served with many of our security professionals in Libya and around the world. They are my friends and colleagues. And I trust them with my life.

One of them is my colleague Eric Nordstrom, and he will speak about his time at Embassy Tripoli as the Regional Security Officer.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I look forward to answering your questions.

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