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# On-The-Record Briefing by Under Secretary Kennedy

Special Briefing  
Patrick F. Kennedy  
Under Secretary for Management  
Washington, DC  
October 10, 2012

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Hello, everyone. I never thought I'd say this, but I thought I'd come down here and take a few more questions. (Laughter.) But first, let me run over a few points and then I'll be happy to take any questions that you might have.

There are many questions that still remain unanswered, and our search for those answers are obviously going to continue. But we can't lose sight really about what this is all about. We didn't lose an ambassador; we lost Chris. Our Information Management officer didn't die; Sean Smith was killed. And we know the two security personnel weren't merely lost; Rone and Bob, who protected us, were murdered.

Let me tell you a little bit more about the five agents who were on the compound that evening. We know that Scott nearly lost his life trying to protect Chris Stevens. And we know that David was so badly injured that at this very moment he still remains in serious condition at Walter Reed Hospital. And we know that Alec and Zack and Scott and Renaldo and Dave went in and out of the burning building again and again, trying to find both Chris and Sean.

So everything must always come back to those four Americans who were killed and the dozens of Americans who fought for their own lives in service to our country. Anything less dishonors their service and sacrifice. What they all went through that night in Benghazi was nothing short of combat. We've heard a lot about the 16-member SST, the Site Security Team. We certainly greatly value that team during its stay in Libya. Our support from the Department of Defense was and is always superb. But that team was based in Tripoli, not in Benghazi. It provided security to Tripoli, not Benghazi. On a small number of occasions, a couple of SST members would travel to Benghazi for very specific reasons, but they were not part of the long-term security presence in Benghazi.

We also have heard about staffing in Benghazi. Eric Nordstrom stated that he wanted somewhere between three and five agents in Benghazi. And on the night of September 11<sup>th</sup>, there were five Diplomatic Security special agents there. Some have suggested that a few more security personnel would have changed things. I think Eric Nordstrom said it clearest in responding, "Having an extra foot of wall or an extra half-dozen guards or agents would not have enabled us to respond to that kind of assault."

Let me say a little bit about the process and how things work as well. We have security professionals in Washington – many, many, if not all of them who have many years of experience in the field. And then we have the field professionals, our Regional Security Officers.

This is not a matter of rejecting requests. This is a matter of a dialogue that goes back and forth between our professionals in the field and our professionals in Washington looking for the right solution. We make sure that they do that, and they do it all the time. And one of the ways that happens, because this is a dialogue, someone says, "I need A, B, and C." The professionals in Washington, with all the experience they have, say, "I see your point. Functionally, isn't this what you're asking for? What about if we send you B, C, and D instead?" We arrive at a solution. We arrived at solutions for Benghazi.

Nobody takes this more seriously than we do to find the right solution. And after the tragic events of that evening, nothing will hold us more accountable about that.

A word of why – a word about why we're in Benghazi. You know more about Benghazi maybe than I do. You may know more about Libya than I do. But what I know is that a new Libya was being born. It was – its birth took place in Benghazi. It was still one of the major two regions in that country. And what needed to happen is we had to be represented both in the capital, but we also had to be represented in Benghazi when so – where so much was going on. We had to be there if we were going to participate in the new Libya, if we were going to build the partnership that is going to last us decades.

And with that, I'd be glad to take any questions that you might have.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. So, Pat, yeah, a lot was said today and a lot was said at rather large, loud volume as well, but I wanted to – and you mentioned one thing that Mr. Nordstrom said in his prepared comments but didn't actually say in person. They were in his prepared comments about that, but I want to concentrate on something else he said towards the end, and he seemed to make a point, or was given the opportunity to make the point of saying that, "For me" – this is the quote: "For me, the Taliban is on the inside of the building." And as a career Foreign Service officer, I'm wondering what your reaction to that is, if you've talked to anyone else in the building about that comment, and what they think about it --

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** No. I mean --

**QUESTION:** -- and what it says about Mr. Nordstrom, if anything.

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** I've just gotten back, after being on the Hill. I am extremely, extraordinarily proud of the Diplomatic Security Service. These are individuals I've worked with for almost 40 years. They are the best of the best. They're extraordinary professionals. And I was simply surprised to hear language like that used.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. I was just wondering, and given where you are now – and I obviously understand the constraints that you're under, but having gone through the testimony today, is there anything that you think you would or the Department should have done differently either in handling the incident itself or in handling the information release about it?

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** On the first question, did we do everything right, that is the subject for the Accountability Review Board. The Secretary has commissioned it. It's

running. It's for them to tell us. We are looking and reviewing all our processes right now. But that question is going to be asked by the independent ARB.

As to your second question about information, this is obviously an incredibly complicated situation. We've always made clear from the very beginning that we are giving out the best information we have at the time we are giving it out. That information has evolved over time. For example, if any Administration official, including any career official, had been on television on Sunday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, they would have said the same thing that Ambassador Rice would have said. She had information at that point from the intelligence community, and that is the same information I had and this – I would have made exactly the same points. Clearly, we know more today, but we knew what we knew when we knew it.

**MS. NULAND:** Jill.

**QUESTION:** One of the things that Mr. Issa said was that ultimately, that the biggest question of all is: Were there really enough people in place to protect? And he said in spite of whatever happened, the Ambassador is dead and the three other Americans are dead.

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Correct.

**QUESTION:** So that doesn't ring true to Americans. So what do you say to that? And then also, could we just get your views on what happened today at this hearing? Was it a useful endeavor?

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Let me take the first point first. The State Department goes into inherently dangerous places all the time. That's our mission. We have to operate forward. We're there when the military is not there, we're there when others are not there. It is our job to advance the U.S. national security everywhere. In that circumstances, we look at all the intelligence, we look at all the information that has had – that's available. We come up with a mitigation strategy to reduce the level of risk. But we're never going to end that risk. If we were to end risk, we would close 275-odd missions and withdraw to the United States.

We live with risk, but with the professionals in the Department, the professionals of the Diplomatic Security Service, we look for ways to mitigate that risk and we make those measurements on the basis of the intelligence and other information that we collect, and then we come up with a strategy. If we cannot mitigate that risk, we withdraw. We withdrew from Tripoli. We withdrew from Damascus.

**MS. NULAND:** Last one --

**QUESTION:** And there was – the other part was your evaluation --

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** -- of what happened today because it got quite heated at many more points.

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** When I – I've been confirmed, I think, three or four times. Every time you're confirmed, you tell the Congress that you will appear before the Congress for hearings. I regard it as both an honor and a privilege to be called. The Legislative Branch of the U.S. Government is incredibly important, and it is my job as a confirmed official to appear before them. They had a lot of questions. We answered lots of their questions. I regard that as my job.

**MS. NULAND:** Last one tonight, then we're going to give Pat a break. Margaret.

**QUESTION:** If you've spoken with the Secretary today, I'd be interested in hearing what her reaction was. And secondly, you've talked a lot about the risk of being in Benghazi. Was it worth the risk to have that consulate there? And will it be worth the risk going forward to have a U.S. presence there?

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** I talked to the Secretary this morning before the hearing. I have not seen her since then. Obviously, we're reassessing whether or not and when we could return to Benghazi. We still regard it as a very, very critical location in our overall engagement with the Government of Libya. But a final decision on how, when, or if we can go back is – has not yet been made.

**QUESTION:** But what you were saying – can I correctly characterize what you're saying is it was worth the risk to have a presence in Benghazi? Because you were talking of the need --

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Okay. On the basis of the information we had at that point, it was worth the risk. We did our mitigation strategy, but as I think I said in the hearing, the lethality of an armed massed attack by dozens of individuals is something greater than we've ever seen in Libya over the last period that we've been there.

**MS. NULAND:** Thank you all very much, and thank you --

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Thank you.

**MS. NULAND:** -- Under Secretary Kennedy.

**UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY:** Thank you very much.

**MS. NULAND:** Thank you.

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