

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings
“Hearing 2: Reviewing Efforts to Secure U.S. Diplomatic Facilities and Personnel”
December 10, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding today’s hearing, as well as our previous hearing three months ago on this same topic, which was proposed by Congressman Schiff. These two hearings demonstrate the continued commitment of both Democrats and Republicans to making our embassies safe.

Over the course of eighteen months of exhaustive investigations – first by the independent Accountability Review Board and then by seven congressional committees – we have learned many answers to questions about what happened in Benghazi and what changes are needed to improve security at our diplomatic facilities overseas.

But as we have also seen, when it comes to Benghazi, too many people are unaware that questions have been answered or are unwilling to accept the answers they hear. Our *Benghazi on the Record: Asked and Answered* website centralizes, in one place, these answers.

Since we met last, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence publicly released its bipartisan, unanimously adopted report. As our Intelligence Committee colleagues explained, their “report, and the nearly two years of intensive investigation it reflects, is meant to serve as the definitive House statement on the Intelligence Community’s activities before, during, and after the tragic events that caused the death of four brave Americans.”

These bipartisan findings join the previous conclusions of the Republican-led House Armed Services Committee about the military’s readiness and response on the night of the attacks.

Our Committee’s Democratic Members have urged the Chairman to review and accept these findings, as we do not think that there is any reason for this Committee to reinvestigate these facts, repeat the work already completed by our Republican and Democratic colleagues, and squander millions of additional taxpayer dollars in the process.

We appreciate that the Chairman has decided to use this hearing to focus on constructive reform, instead of retreading the same ground that other Committees have already investigated. We urge him to keep his focus on these constructive efforts and not be lured off this path by partisan politics.

And I appreciate you, Mr. Chairman, for our discussion where you have agreed -- by the end of the year -- to give us a scope as to exactly what we will be looking at. And hopefully we will be able to come to conclusions about what we agree on, so that we can focus on the things that we still need to investigate.

I also appreciate the fact that you have agreed to meet with me and the Speaker tomorrow with regard to rules of the Committee. I think you and I agree it's nice to have structure because it helps us to deal with the issues that may come up. And I do really appreciate that.

Immediately after the Benghazi attacks, the independent Accountability Review Board conducted a blistering examination of what went wrong at the State Department and identified 29 recommendations for reform. Secretary Clinton accepted every single one, and the Inspector General reported that "the Department wasted no time addressing the recommendations."

During our first hearing three months ago, Assistant Secretary Starr testified that the Department had closed 22 of the ARB's 29 recommendations. Since then, the Department has continued making steady progress. It has closed three more recommendations and continues to make progress on the remaining four.

The Department has now delivered fire safety equipment to all but one high-threat post, and it has affirmed compliance with fire safety and equipment requirements in safe havens and safe areas in overseas facilities. The ARB found that the lack of adequate fire safety equipment may have contributed to the tragic consequences that night, so I am heartened to hear that the Department has completed this recommendation since our last hearing.

The Department has also closed the recommendation for increasing diplomatic security staffing to address the staffing shortcomings identified by the ARB. Mr. Starr's testimony indicates that the new positions are fully funded and that the Department intends to complete all of the remaining new hires by early 2015.

The Department also has instituted mandatory threat training for high risk posts and created a working group to develop joint risk management courses, further addressing shortcomings that the ARB identified with regard to the training and expertise of Department personnel. I look forward to hearing more from Mr. Starr on the work that remains to be done.

We are also joined today by Inspector General Linick. In a September 2013 report, his office made seven security-related recommendations that overlapped to a large degree with the ARB's recommendations. I was heartened to hear that six of those recommendations are now closed. Concerns remain, however, including lingering questions about whether the Department has made sufficient changes to ensure that Department bureaus are communicating effectively and decision-making authority is centralized and clear.

Regarding the ARB process, the Inspector General's office examined the 12 ARBs convened following the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings through the 2012 Benghazi attacks. They concluded that the ARB process "operates as intended – independently and without bias – to identify vulnerabilities in the Department of State's security programs."

The Inspector General nonetheless recommended adjustments to the process, and it is my understanding that discussions on those recommendations are ongoing.

One of these recommendations was for the Department to amend its Foreign Affairs Manual to institutionalize responsibility for ARB implementation. As the Inspector General's report noted "handling of the Benghazi ARB recommendations represent[ed] a significant departure from the previous norm in that Secretary Clinton took charge directly of oversight for the implementation process."

The Inspector General found that the high-level attention devoted to this task "establishes a model for how the department should handle future ARB recommendations." I am interested in hearing from Mr. Starr whether the Department has made the recommended change.

Thank you, and I yield back.