

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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April 30, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write today to renew the Subcommittee on National Security's February 5, 2020, request for information related to the January 5, 2020, terrorist attack on Cooperative Security Location Manda Bay, Kenya.¹

The attack on U.S. military and civilian personnel, assets, and facilities at Manda Bay killed three American citizens: U.S. Army Spc. Henry J. Mayfield, Jr., and Department of Defense (DOD) contractors Bruce Triplett and Dustin Harrison. The attack also resulted in the damage and destruction of multiple U.S. aircraft, medical evacuation helicopters, a fuel storage area, and other portions of the Manda Bay Airfield utilized by U.S. forces to support critical counterterrorism operations against al-Shabaab in East Africa.²

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander General Stephen J. Townsend acknowledged that "we were not as prepared there in Manda Bay as we needed to be."³ Press reports have also underscored glaring security lapses at the compound, including a lack of intelligence, delayed response and evacuation efforts, and the inadequate performance of host-country security forces.⁴

¹ Letter from Chairman Stephen F. Lynch and Ranking Member Jody B. Hice, Subcommittee on National Security, to Secretary Mark T. Esper, Department of Defense, and Secretary Michael R. Pompeo, Department of State (Feb. 5, 2020).

² *Chaos as Militants Overran Airfield, Killing 3 Americans in Kenya*, New York Times (Jan. 22, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/01/22/world/africa/shabab-kenya-terrorism.html).

³ *U.S. Africa and Southern Command Operations*, Hearing Before the Senate Armed Services Committee (Jan. 30, 2020) (online at www.c-span.org/video/?468720-1/us-africa-southern-command-operations).

⁴ *Pentagon Chief Orders New Review of Attack That Killed 3 Americans in Kenya*, New York Times (Apr. 12, 2021) (online at www.nytimes.com/2021/04/12/us/politics/kenya-attack-pentagon.html).

In the wake of the attack, AFRICOM initiated an Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 investigation to examine the facts and circumstances that may have contributed to the deadly security breach, which we understand has now concluded.⁵

DOD announced earlier this month that you have completed an “initial review” of the AR 15-6 investigation into the Manda Bay attack and subsequently ordered an independent review led by a four-star general officer outside of the AFRICOM chain of command.⁶ At your direction, Acting Secretary of the Army John E. Whitley appointed General Paul Funk, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, to lead this review and determine whether further investigation, or even disciplinary action, is warranted.⁷

According to DOD, “[i]t is the Secretary’s desire to ensure there is a full examination and consideration of the contributing factors that led to this tragic event and that appropriate action is taken to reduce the risk of future occurrence.”⁸ We share your commitment to conducting a thorough investigation of the January 5, 2020, attack in order to better defend U.S. military personnel and installations in East Africa and other expeditionary facilities around the world.

However, on April 20, 2021, General Townsend testified before the Committee on Armed Services:

[L]et me reassure you and the other members that all the steps that have been needed to take corrective action, immediate corrective action, have been taken long ago. Not only did we take those steps in Manda Bay, we took that report and applied those lessons learned at every base across Africa.⁹

Without having been briefed on the findings of AFRICOM’s Manda Bay investigation, or any corrective actions that may have been implemented, our Subcommittee has been unable to fulfill its constitutional oversight role to ensure that AFRICOM has the necessary authorities and resources to help protect our military, civilian, and contractor personnel serving in remote and often dangerous locations overseas.

To that end, we request that DOD produce to our Subcommittee by May 7, 2021, a copy of the final AR 15-6 investigation report related to the January 5, 2020, attack in Manda Bay,

⁵ U.S. Africa Command, *Press Release: U.S. Africa Command Investigation Update: Al-Shabaab Attack in Manda Bay, Kenya* (Feb. 10, 2020) (online at www.africom.mil/pressrelease/32559/us-africa-command-investigation-update-al-sha).

⁶ Department of Defense, *Press Release: Statement from Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby on 4-Star Reviewer Appointment on Manda Bay Investigation* (Apr. 12, 2021) (online at www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2570030/statement-from-pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-on-4-star-reviewer-appoint/).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing on National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Middle East and North Africa* (Apr. 20, 2021) (online at <https://armedservices.house.gov/hearings?ID=27955030-45AF-48D2-AC18-4944F2BB2F93>).

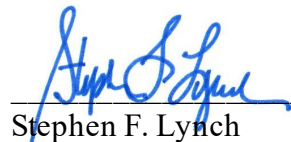
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Kenya. In addition, we request that your office, in coordination with AFRICOM, provide a briefing to our Subcommittee Members on the findings of the report, as well as the circumstances surrounding your decision to direct the Acting Secretary of the Army to appoint a four-star general to conduct an independent review of the AFRICOM investigation.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable Stephen J. Townsend, Commander
U.S. Africa Command