



LEGISLATIVE
AFFAIRS

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-3000

The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

MAY -7 2013

Dear Representative Cummings:

Thank you for your letter of May 2, 2013, to the Secretary of Defense regarding the attacks on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya. In response to the initial attack on the Temporary Mission Facility on September 11, 2012, the Commander of AFRICOM recommended and the Secretary of Defense immediately approved ordering the movement of the shared EUCOM-AFRICOM special operations Commanders In-Extremis Force (CIF) to respond. When the attack occurred, the CIF was conducting a training exercise in Croatia. Because exact conditions on the ground in Benghazi were unknown at the time of the order of the AFRICOM commander, the CIF immediately began to fulfill its tasking by pre-positioning at an intermediate staging location, Naval Air Station Sigonella. From the moment the CIF was ordered to move, it did not stand down until after all personnel (including the fallen) had been evacuated from Benghazi a little over 12 hours after the initiation of the attack.

In regard to the anonymous allegation that the CIF could have arrived in Benghazi prior to the initiation of the second attack on the Annex, the time needed from alerting the CIF to landing at the Benghazi airport is greater than the approximately 7.5 hours between the initiation of the first attack and that of the second one. As such, the time requirements for notification, load, and transit alone prevented the CIF from being at the Annex in time enough to change events. This analysis is consistent with the findings of the Accountability Review Board,¹ and the Senate Homeland Security Committee.²

¹ "The Board members believe every possible effort was made to rescue and recover Ambassador Stevens and Sean Smith. The interagency response was timely and appropriate, but there simply was not enough time for armed U.S. military assets to have made a difference." Department of State, Accountability Review Board on Benghazi (December 19, 2012) at 7.

² "DOD and AFRICOM tried to provide effective support on September 11th, but given the nature of the attack in Benghazi and the distance of their assets from Benghazi, they were tragically unable to do so." U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, *Flashing Red: A Special Report on the Terrorist Attack on Benghazi* (December 30, 2012) at 21.

If the Department can be of further assistance, please contact Mr. Bill Hudson at (703)-693-2648.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth Lee King". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "E" and a long, sweeping "K".

cc:
The Honorable Darrell E. Issa
Chairman