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SELECT COMMITTEE ON BENGHAZI,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: ADMIRAL KURT W. TIDD

Monday, April 4, 2016

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in HVC-302, commencing
at time 1:00 p.m.

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Appearances:

For the SELECT COMMITTEE ON BENGHAZI:

PHILIP G. KIKO, STAFF DIRECTOR AND GENERAL COUNSEL

MAC TOLAR, SENIOR COUNSEL

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Ms. Clarke. This is a transcribed interview of Admiral Kurt Tidd, conducted by the House Select Committee on Benghazi. This interview is being conducted voluntarily, as part of the committee's investigation into the attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi, Libya, and related matters, pursuant to House Resolution 567 of the 113th Congress and House Resolution 5 of the 114th Congress.

Would the witness please state your name for the record.

Admiral Tidd. Curt Walter Tidd.

Ms. Clarke. Thank you. Admiral Tidd, the committee appreciates your appearance at this interview today. My name is Sheria Clarke, and I am with the committee's majority staff. And I will just ask everyone around the table to introduce themselves as well.

Mr. Tolar. Mac Tolar, majority staff.

Ms. Sachsman Grooms. I am Susanne Sachsman Grooms from the minority staff.

Ms. Green. Shannon Green, with minority staff.

Mr. Kenny. Peter Kenny, minority staff.

Ms. Gonzalez. Elizabeth Gonzalez, SOUTHCOM Legislative Affairs.

Mr. Hudson. Bill Hudson from the Department of Defense.

Mr. Richards. Edward Richards, DOD OGC.

Ms. Clarke. Thank you.

Before we begin, I would like to go over the ground rules and explain how the interview will proceed.

The majority will ask questions for up to an hour, and then the

minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of time, if they choose. We will rotate back and forth, accordingly, until everyone has exhausted all their questions.

As you can see, an Official Reporter is taking down everything we say to make a written record. I would ask that you give verbal responses to all questions, such as yes and no, as opposed to nods of the head. I am going to ask the reporter to please feel free to jump in in case you do respond nonverbally.

Do you understand that?

Admiral Tidd. Understood.

Ms. Clarke. Also, we should both try not to talk over each other so it is easier to get a clear record.

We just ask that today you give us your best recollection. And if there are things you do not know or can't remember, just say so, and please inform us as to who, to the best of your knowledge, may be able to provide a more complete answer.

You are required to answer questions from Congress truthfully. Do you understand that?

Admiral Tidd. I do.

Ms. Clarke. This also applies to questions posed by congressional staff in the interview. Do you understand this as well?

Admiral Tidd. I do.

Ms. Clarke. Witnesses that knowingly provide false testimony can be subject to criminal prosecution for perjury or for making false statements. Do you understand that?

Admiral Tidd. I do.

Ms. Clarke. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers to today's questions?

Admiral Tidd. No.

Ms. Clarke. Thank you. That is the end of my preamble.

Does the minority have anything they would like to say?

Ms. Green. Sir, we just appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to spend a little bit of time with us. We look forward to talking with you and keeping it relatively short.

Admiral Tidd. Certainly.

Ms. Clarke. The clock now reads 1:01, and we will get started with the first hour of questions.

EXAMINATION BY MS. CLARKE

Q Admiral Tidd, can you briefly walk me through your billets as a flag officer?

A I was -- my first flag officer billet was on the National Security Council staff in defense policy. After that, I was the commander, Carrier Strike Group 8, embarked on the USS Eisenhower. After that, I was the vice director for operations on the Joint Staff, followed by commander of U.S. Naval Forces South and the U.S. 4th Fleet, followed by the director for operations on the Joint Staff, followed by the assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and then to my current assignment as commander, U.S. Southern Command.

Q Thank you. And during the time of the attack in Benghazi, what was your job? Were you currently the director for operations?

[REDACTED]

A Correct.

Q And how long did you hold that position?

A For about 15, 16 months.

Q Can you briefly describe that role; kind of your day-to-day routine in that role?

A The director for operations was responsible for the coordination and the synchronization of operations of U.S. military forces supporting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, communicating with the regional combatant commanders and the functional combatant commanders. There is a whole long laundry list of other things, but, basically, it is the director of operations.

Q Prior to today, have you ever been questioned about the events surrounding Benghazi and/or the Department of Defense's response to those events?

A Yes, multiple times.

Q Okay. And can you elaborate on those times?

A I met with the Department of State review board.

Q Is that the Accountability Review Board?

A Yes, the ARB, correct. And then also with the House Armed Services Committee also conducted -- I don't know if it was a hearing or investigation -- but I met with them and provided information to them as well. And then, let's see, as I recall, a number of briefings to Members. And I have lost track of who and how many times.

[Tidd Exhibit No. 1]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Was marked for identification.]

Q So I would like to just direct your attention to the night of the attack. The first thing I will do is just hand out a timeline that DOD prepared. And we will use this as kind of a guide for our discussion today.

Mr. Tolar. This is marked as Exhibit 1.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q So, on this timeline it indicates the attack began at approximately 3:42 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. Can you kind of walk us through when you became aware of the attacks and the events -- the steps that you took following notification of those attacks?

A My recollection was that the first reports I got was from the National Military Command Center after -- so some point after 4:32 -- sometime between 4:30 and 5. Specific steps were to attempt to find out more information. At that point, the NMCC was receiving reports coming in -- my recollection was the initial report came in from the State Department, but about the same time we reached out to commander, U.S. AFRICOM staff in Stuttgart, and they attempted to get more information. Initial information was very, very sketchy. And so we were waiting to get more information.

Mr. Tolar. Admiral, I apologize, but in terms of the NMCC, what is that organization?

Admiral Tidd. That is the watch center that is in the Pentagon, and I am responsible for the NMCC. It comes under the J3, the director for operations in the Joint Staff. And it is a communications focal

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

point for all of the regional combatant commanders to report information in.

Mr. Tolar. Thank you, sir.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q So, once you received the information from the NMCC and you began to find out more information, did you -- following that notification, did you have any interaction with Secretary Panetta or General Dempsey about what you had learned from the National Military Command Center?

A Not directly. Not personally right away. Because, as I recall, they were heading over to a meeting, and they were departing about the time that these reports came in. We provided information to his office. I did not personally make contact with him at that point. And just to relay here's what we know, and more information to follow.

Mr. Tolar. Who were you communicating with, sir?

Admiral Tidd. At his office?

Mr. Tolar. Do you recall?

Admiral Tidd. No, I don't recall.

Mr. Tolar. Thank you.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q As you mentioned, Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey were en route to a meeting or getting ready to prepare to go to a meeting at the White House at around 5 p.m., and then I believe, according to the timeline, they returned around 6 p.m. At that time, did you have

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

interaction with them?

A You're asking me to recall specific events from almost 4 years ago. My recollection of that evening was a bit of a blur, I will be honest at this point. It was a series of continuous phone calls talking with my counterpart, the J3 on U.S. AFRICOM staff, and the deputy commander, U.S. AFRICOM, in just a series of secure phone calls as information was coming in, and then making sure that we were sharing information laterally via the NMCC as quickly as we had it, just to try and provide situational awareness as broadly as we could. I don't recall any longer what the specific sequence of events and who I talked to at which time. Sorry.

Q I understand that. Did you participate in any meetings following the Secretary of Defense's return to the Pentagon? According to the timeline, there were a series of meetings in the Pentagon with senior officials. Did you participate any of those meetings, if you can recall?

A The meeting that I recalled participating in was a Deputies' Committee meeting that occurred by secure teleconference. And it pulled together all of the various deputies and members. And it was, initially, all of the various intelligence organizations passed what information that they had and, I guess, to situate the things that had been going on across this window: a series of events associated with Cairo, unrest and instability in Tunis, and instability and unrest down in Khartoum. And we had a series of

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

problems in Sana'a in Yemen. And then this event that occurred in Libya. But it was sort of -- initially, it was one in a series of -- not a series, but one of a number of simultaneous unrest activities that were occurring.

[Tidd Exhibit No. 2

Was marked for identification.]

Q I'm going to hand you what we will mark as Exhibit 2. If you can take a look at this.

Just for the record, Exhibit 2 is doc ID number C05580538, and it is a September 11, 2012 series of emails. And I believe, sir, you were not a recipient of this email, but it refers to a SVTC that occurred on that evening and, potentially, what you were just referring to in your testimony. So I wanted to have you take a look at this and then we will just discuss it.

A This looks like the OSD -- the Office of Secretary of Defense's -- summary of that Deputies Committee meeting.

Q Okay. So this is a readout, as you mentioned, from the Office of the Secretary of Defense -- a readout from the policy of what happened or the discussion that was held during the SVTC at 7:30 on September 11.

A Right.

Q So, I just wanted to kind of talk with you a little bit about some of the things that are discussed in here.

The first paragraph down notes that you were present, as well as Jeremy Bash. I think you have already indicated that.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The third paragraph down, it talks about a five-person Special Operations Force team arriving in Tripoli. Do you recall what that Special Operation Force team was or what this is referring to?

A I believe this was -- and now, I have to admit, having read through a number of the after action reviews and the studies, I have a better understanding today than I did when it was actually going on at the time.

At the time, my understanding, these were some people who were assigned to the embassy in Tripoli that basically pulled together as an ad hoc team to move to this site at Benghazi.

Q And then it also mentions, "U.S.-controlled ISR assets providing coverage (feed to AFRICOM and NMCC). Vice Admiral Tidd had no information from the ISR feed at the time of the VTC.

A Yes. This was an unmanned Predator drone that had been flying under AFRICOM's control, I believe -- I want to say in the vicinity of Derna, and was attempting to maintain a watch on potential radical Islamists in Derna. When the reports came in of this incident taking place in Benghazi, AFRICOM diverted the drone over to the vicinity of Benghazi to attempt to acquire the site and then watch what was going on.

But it was -- we were able to call up the feed and see what AFRICOM was looking at, but AFRICOM was kind of controlling where it was flying and what it was looking at. I have subsequently seen that video. But if I had not had somebody sit with me and explain to me exactly what

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

was going on, it was very difficult to try and pick out what was happening.

It was as we were preparing for the ARB that I finally got a sense of exactly what was going on. If you looked at it, after watching it live, and particularly -- it is not like you have got this commentary that is running in the background, you're just looking at black and white images and trying to sort out where it is, what you're looking at, who's who. It was a very confusing seen.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Sir, do you recall if the Predators were armed that evening?

A They were not.

Q Do you recall that specifically they were not?

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q So, on the second page of this email, the second full paragraph begins with, "The U.S. military has begun notifying special units of likely deployment," and it goes through and identifies those units as the FAST platoon, the Crisis Intervention Force [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Right.

Q In your role as the J3, did you participate in discussions regarding which assets the military should use in response to this crisis?

A We spoke with AFRICOM and found out from them what forces were available, as well as talking with -- they were in close coordination with EUCOM. Because at that point in time, AFRICOM did not have all of its own dedicated crisis response forces, and they were coordinating with U.S. European Command. They provided the CIF -- or they mentioned that they had a CIF, but that the CIF was engaged in an exercise in the Balkans and Croatia, as I recall, and the FAST was in Rota -- a FAST platoon was in Rota and was available. But at that time we did not have organic lift co-located with the FAST platoon in Rota. The aircraft that would have been required to move it was up in Ramstein. So we worked out what would be the timelines to be able to move that force as rapidly as possible.

The same with the CIF. Its aircraft were not co-located with the force that was engaged in this exercise. And so there was a delay in moving its dedicated aircraft to be able to go

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and get them pulled together and loaded up onto an aircraft and be able to move.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] there was a very kind of a rapid series of events of initially we had a report that the ambassador was missing. And so with the concern that we potentially had a hostage rescue requirement, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and then a direction to -- and my recommendations was let's get them moving and headed toward the theatre so that as we sort out this rapidly changing kind of chaotic information situation, as they began to take the steps that would be required for them to be able to move, we subsequently got information in that the Ambassador had been located and was dead.

We had information on his location at the hospital, but it still seemed prudent at that point, since, again, we had a lot going on and a lot of uncertainty as to what the potential next asks might be, that the best move we could make [REDACTED] [REDACTED] moved to the theatre, to an intermediate staging base close by, because they would have the greatest capability to be able to respond to the widest variety of unknown crisis type of activities. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So the sooner we could get them there to theatre, the better we would be postured to be able to respond to whatever might be coming next.

My recollection was, at this point in time we were getting very

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

serious concerns about the security of the embassy in Tripoli -- in Tripoli, yes -- also the embassy in Tunis. And the situation in Cairo was also very, very unstable. So, frankly, we just didn't know what else we might have coming, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The FAST platoon we wanted to get there as quickly as possible, but they're a static defensive force. And the sense of you want to get them into an embassy or a location that you want to defend. They are not an assault force that would go and conduct an active assault. They don't have that kind of mobility. Their training and their equipment is to be able to provide a very robust static defense. So you, ideally, move them into a place before you have a security situation occur.

Q And you mentioned the timelines for the FAST team and the CIF team moving. Do you recall what those timelines were?

A I don't, off the top of my head, any longer. What we communicated to the units that are responsible for owning them -- so it was EUCOM and AFRICOM for the FAST, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The one thing we could not overcome is just the time-distance factors of moving from the East Coast of the United States into the theatre.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Admiral, one of the lingering questions that we have been trying to get a handle on is why it seemed to take so long to get the response forces off the ground. The FAST team was in Rota [REDACTED] [REDACTED] They were ready to move prior to that. They sat on the tarmac for about 6 hours before the planes got there.

A That is because we had no alert aircraft in Ramstein. So, literally, it was the middle of the night there. And I don't know all of the exact actions that they had to go to, but at Ramstein they had to go and generate the airplanes, get the air crews, wake them up, brief them, tell them what we knew, and have the planes ready to go. We did not have an alert posture set for the aircraft.

Q Were you tracking that that night; the FAST team?

A Yes.

Q And the time it took?

A Yes.

Q Did you have concerns about how long it was taking?

A Everybody wanted them there instantaneously. And we were getting a lot of questions, obviously, from both the State Department and the White House: Are they moving yet, are they moving yet? It

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

was just taking a long time.

Q Did you reach out to anyone in order to find out what was taking so long? Was there anything else that could be done to expedite?

A I did not, no. My conversations were with AFRICOM, with the J3, and the Deputy Commander. I was taking information from them.

Q I apologize, who was the J3? Do you recall?

A Rear Admiral Rich Landholt.

Q And then I guess the same question I'm going to pose to you with regard to the CIF. They sat on the tarmac for about 9 hours.

A Honestly, I don't know where their airplanes were. Those pieces, it was a little bit fuzzy getting all the understanding. All I knew is they were involved in an exercise. And that told me that they were not sitting on their rucks, ready to go, ready to deploy when the first ask came out; that it would take them some -- there would be some period of time required for them to recover back to the location, pull their stuff together, and then be set and ready to go. Honestly, I don't recall where their aircraft were located.

Q So, as you are aware, the CIF [REDACTED] [REDACTED] which is what they had done that night. Who can waive that requirement that that's no longer relevant or they don't have to meet that requirement?

A I don't recall. I don't know. I don't know that anybody waives it. I don't know. But like I said, they were in an exercise. I know that they were maintaining the ability to be able to meet the requirements that they had. All of this is in learning subsequently

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

the details of it, not what was going on at the time.

Q

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] doesn't make their string requirement, does that give you pause at the J3 level? Are you all tracking that or is that not something you all typically track?

A Obviously, if there are known reasons, which, from time to time, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] at the Joint Staff we weren't tracking the individual combatant commanders' CIF or CRE, what goes on internal to those, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

And at times, if, for instance, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Other than the SOC Europe Commander, is there anyone else you think would have a better understanding of the CIF, their response, et cetera, that evening?

A I think that person would have the best understanding.

Q With regard to the airlift for the FAST platoons, other than the USAFE commander, is there someone else you think might have a better understanding?

A That is the person -- my understanding, again after the fact -- my understanding is that was the person who was kind of personally engaged in trying to expedite getting the aircraft moving.

Q Do you know who has the authority to waive crew rest for a respective unit?

A I don't know.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q Thank you, Admiral. Just stepping back for a little bit, we have been discussing a SVTC that occurred on the evening of September 11th. From your recollection, what was the purpose of this particular SVTC?

A It was an information exchange to cross-level what does

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

everybody know, is there any new information. The intelligence community was obviously providing information on other things that were going on, other locations that State was providing information on, other embassies where they had concerns. FBI. It was a general kind of a roundtable and round robin of everybody going around and passing out what information they had, what did they know. And then what were the asks. And then an opportunity for us to be able to say -- when we got to the military, we talked about these are the types of forces that we can deploy, and here's what we know, here's what we think, and here's what our recommendations are.

Q And did you have any specific asks from the State Department or from any other agency at that meeting regarding what DOD could do?

A We went down the list of the types of forces that are potentially available. And one of the things that was mentioned was the FEST, which is the Foreign Emergency Support Team, which is basically an administrative embassy augmentation team when you have a crisis going on.

We talked about the CIF -- the FAST, the CIF, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] FEST. And from State, their only position was: send triggers pullers. The FEST they said they didn't need.

And at this point, I mean there was -- my recollection is there was some serious consideration -- we didn't know how long the embassy in Tripoli was going to be open. So, I think what they were interested in was not to throw a whole bunch of people into Tripoli that they would

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

then subsequently have to get out of there. But they were looking at all of the the other embassies that might potentially need help, and they said: No, send the FAST [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] CIF.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q There were questions about how long the Tripoli Embassy would be open. Was that in response to the attacks in Benghazi?

A Yes. People were recovering back to there, but there was still a lot of concern at that point on what was the security posture, what was the situation in Tripoli itself. Because, again, you remember, the same day you had the embassy in Cairo was under attack, at the embassy in Tunis there was an assault. It was just all of these different embassies -- and we were looking at what are the other embassies out there that might potentially also face some sort of similar violence and what could we do to posture ourselves to be able to deal with it.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q And at the time of the meeting, what was the status of the assets that you all discussed? Were they preparing to deploy?

A They were alerted. The final decision had not yet been made definitively, as I recall, but we came out of that meeting with basically: send everything. But at the time, again, we were talking about the CIF [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] send it to an intermediate staging base, someplace close by. And I turned that one over to AFRICOM and let them decide

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

where did they think would be the best location, and talk to EUCOM and sort out what would be the best location and just have everybody rendezvous there at that location as we sorted out the situation on the ground in Tripoli was going to look like and where we might need to send people.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Sir, was it your decision, then, to send them back to an ISB first?

A Yes. Because we didn't -- State was not prepared to send [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And State was very, very concerned about what the footprint would look like in Tripoli. They didn't want it to look like we were invading.

That was the gist or that was the genesis of the discussion that occurred over whether or not when the FEST arrives at the airport in Tripoli -- because they wanted to reinforce security at the embassy -- but there was concern that it not have this image of a big, invading force.

And we knew that the FAST, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And there was just concern of parading a bunch of trucks or buses full of Marines in uniform, what kind of image that would present, recognizing it was going to be daylight when they arrived.

[REDACTED]

And so this discussion went back and forth -- what should it look like, let's get them in -- but they wanted -- in a perfect world, they would want them all to just kind of appear instantaneously at the embassy but not have to be exposed as they were seen as they went from the airport to the embassy.

Q Was it also your decision, then, not to send the FAST team directly to Tripoli?

A My recollection is we did go directly to -- the FAST went directly from Rota to Tripoli, is my recollection.

Q They went to the ISB first. They all three went to the ISB first.

A Then if that is the way it played out, I think it was probably because we were still waiting on diplomatic approval to be able to bring them into Tripoli. Okay.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q So we are talking about the FAST team going into Tripoli. Following this discussion at the Deputies Committee meeting, was there a decision to send the FAST team to Benghazi?

A We were looking at two FAST teams, but it very, very soon became evident that everybody was leaving Benghazi. And so I don't remember if it was just before that Deputies Committee or during the deputies or just right after.

By the time we came out of the deputies, it was pretty clear that nobody was going to be left in Benghazi. And so the decision -- I think, at the deputies, there was some discussion -- but as I recall,

[REDACTED]

we weren't going to send them to Benghazi, because everybody was going to be back in Tripoli by the time we could actually get them there.

Q I'm sorry, you said that you can't recall whether you had the understanding during the Deputies Committee meeting, but sometime close in time --

A It was right around the time -- my sense was, as we came out of the Deputies Committee meeting, there was never -- as I think my way through it, the discussion that was coming out and what State was telling us and the intelligence community was telling us was that everybody was going to be leaving Benghazi.

And I think even at this point we knew that everybody had moved -- they had moved from the temporary diplomatic facility, they moved to the Annex, and they were moving or going to be moving, if they had not already begun moving, from the Annex to the airport, and would be leaving at the airport as quickly as they could.

So it was pretty clear we weren't going to be able to get anything into Benghazi before the last people left. So, I don't think we ever went beyond the notion of moving the FAST into -- the FAST platoon into Tripoli.

Q And just to make sure I have an understanding of the timeframe of this idea that everyone was leaving Benghazi, this was close in time to your discussion during the Deputies Committee and not later in the early morning after the mortar attack, right?

A I think so, yeah. Like I said, that is my recollection of it.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q You mentioned also -- I think you mentioned that State had a large concern about kind of how the military, whether it was the FAST team or any other assets that went into Libya, how they were presented.

Looking back at the document we were discussing, the last -- the second to last full paragraph at the very bottom, "State remains concerned that any U.S. military intervention be fully coordinated with the Libyan Government." The last sentence is that you "agreed to look into the possibility of deploying units in civilian attire."

Do you recall what that discussion entailed regarding this?

A Again, like I said, they wanted to minimize the signature that looked like a big military invasion, a big military arrival there. And the reason that I remember the discussion was I had to go back and find and make sure, as the FAST had moved out and was waiting for lift, and the question that I had to go back and ask AFRICOM was: in their rucksacks did they have civilian clothes that they could put on, or was this going to entail having to go back to their barracks and draw that equipment. They had what they needed, and so they didn't have to go anyplace.

At that Deputies Committee meeting, I couldn't speak for them. And I wanted would to go back and verify that. Because what I wanted to know is: is it more important to get them there or to have the signature in civilian clothes? As it turned out, it didn't matter, because they had the civilian clothes with them already.

Q Sir, did you make the decision to have them arrive in civilian clothing? Was that your decision?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A No. That was the request from State Department, and I passed that on down to AFRICOM.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q For what it is worth, sir, the FAST platoon commander testified or talked to us in an interview, and he mentioned that once the plane arrived, they were on the bird and then they were there for about 3 hours waiting to take off. It was during that time they kept getting conflicting word about civies versus UTS, and they changed back and forth. Who would have been directing them to do what they did?

A It would have been coming from AFRICOM. But AFRICOM was responding to this back and forth with State over what is the priority, is it to move or is to have them in civies.

Q So State was requesting the civilian clothes?

A Yes. Yes, it was coming from the embassy.

Q It was coming from the embassy?

A The embassy back to Main State, from Main State over to us -- the Pentagon -- and from us to AFRICOM. You can imagine it's about six phone calls to work -- what do you want -- and work your way back through.

Q In that same vein, you made a comment earlier about waiting on diplomatic approval. Would you just elaborate on what you meant by that?

A We wanted to make sure that nobody was going to shoot at the airplanes when they landed at Tripoli. And we needed some assurance from the embassy that they were going to be -- that the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

embassy was ready to receive them; that there wasn't going to be a problem when they came in to land.

Q When you use the term "diplomatic approval," does that go above and beyond requests for an airplane to get cleared to come into the country?

A It is the embassy saying: Yeah, they are approved to come in.

Q And that constitutes what you mean by diplomatic approval?

A Yes.

Q Thank you.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q So, Admiral, you were talking and you said that during the course of this meeting the final decision had not yet been made about which assets would actually be deployed, or I think you said something to that effect.

A I think by the end of the meeting it was that everything would go with the exception of the FEST.

Q Okay. Everything except the FEST would be deployed. What were the next steps that you took in order to actually deploy these assets?

A As I recall, I communicated it to the NMCC [REDACTED] [REDACTED] -- the verbal order -- a VOCO -- a verbal communication to commanding officers -- that we had agreement [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to move the CIF [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Because at that point, we wanted all of them co-located to be able to operate together and cohesively. And then for the FAST to be able to move.

Q And that information, you communicated it to the NMCC. And would that VOCO be provided via a teleconference call or how is that typically done?

A Honestly, I don't know whether they sent that via email or via a phone call down. That was communicated to them to be able to move this.

As I recall, I think I drafted an email that -- a similar email to this one that went back to the chairman. It was drafted up by one of the officers in J3 and I forwarded it to the chairman, to my recollection.

[Tidd Exhibit No. 3

Was marked for identification.]

Q So at this time I would like to introduce Exhibit 3. I think this may be the email that you're referring to. So we'll just take a look at that and have a discussion about that.

A Okay.

Okay.

Q For the record, Exhibit 3 is an email chain on September 11, 2012. And, Admiral, you are CC'd on the first two emails. I don't believe you're on the top email. The doc ID number is SCB 001375.

So, the very last page -- or the second to last page -- is the initial email. I believe it was sent by [Captain [REDACTED] Do

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

you recall what his role was?

A He was the deputy director for operations, the watch officer at the NMCC.

Q In his email -- the email is sent at approximately 8:39 p.m. Just before we discuss that, do you recall how long the Deputies Committee SVTC was that evening?

A I don't. But -- I don't. I really don't. I guess I could look here and see.

Q Do you have a recollection whether or not your participation in that particular meeting ended prior to the end of the meeting? In other words --

A Was I in the entire Deputies Committee SVTC? I think so. I don't remember leaving early. I just don't recall.

Q That's fine.

And so [Captain [REDACTED] writes -- this appears to be an email where he is referring to a National Military Command Center update conference call with several combatant commands. And I guess it is like the second paragraph down it says, "Provided SECDEF's VOCO to PTDO" -- is that prepared to deploy order?

A Right.

Q -- "FAST platoon from Rota, Spain, to Benghazi," and then the same for Spain to Tripoli. It also mentions the Commander's In-Extremis Force and then discusses an RFI -- a request for information -- to AFRICOM/EUCOM for the following: a timeline, number of pax for both CIF and FAST, capabilities, mission, lift requirements,

[REDACTED]

weapons, and mobility on arrival.

Are you aware or do you know where that information would have been -- if AFRICOM had supplied that information, would that have come back to your attention or would that have come back to [Captain ██████████ ██████████?]

A I'm looking at the timelines here and I'm -- I am thinking that -- that [Captain ██████████] had a conference call with the various watch centers of the commands that are listed here as a result of decisions that came out of the Deputies Committee meeting.

And so the things that you see upfront -- the SECDEF VOCO, the things to move, and then also forwarded request for information from AFRICOM and EUCOM for the following -- I am guessing at this point now, but I think this might have been in response to -- I gave him a verbal dump from the Deputies Committee meeting. He had this conference call. This is a report back with the information from the conference call. And then I turned around and replied on top of that with subsequent information that had been provided from phone calls that I had had at the same time. As I read through this, I think that is the way it reads.

Q And so just to refer to your response to [Captain ██████████ ██████████] email, the first line you write, "Discussions at Deputies, and followed up between OSD and the chairman." Is OSD referring to the Office of Secretary of Defense?

A Yes.

Q So following the Deputies Committee meeting, did you have a subsequent conversation with the Secretary or a representative?

[REDACTED]

A I think I had a conversation, as I recall, maybe with General Kelly, who is the Secretary's military assistant.

Q And do you recall the substance of that conversation?

A We were talking about what came out of the Deputies Committee meeting and what the asks were.

Q And then the second paragraph, "SECDEF has directed deployment of the CIF to the ISB determined most suitable by AFRICOM." And I think you referred to that earlier.

A Right.

Q And then the third paragraph, "SECDEF has directed FAST deployment [REDACTED] [REDACTED] same ISB as CIF. Let me know what the N-hour will be."

A That is a synchronizing time that is provided.

[REDACTED] They tell us what it will be.

Q And when you say a synchronizing time, is that to synchronize [REDACTED] or was that for all of the elements?

A No, [REDACTED]

Q And was there a reason [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

A My recollection, from a number of different events,
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Q [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Q And so just to make sure I understood you, your request,
"Let me know what the N-hour will be," was specifically [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A That is what I was talking to. Because there is the formal SECDEF order, it is a formatted message that goes out, and it lists the N-hour in that message. And so we just need it back from them to give us the N-hour so we can put it in the message and the message goes out.

Q Were N-hours established for the other assets -- for the CIF and the FAST team?

A If so -- again, the CIF is responsive to the theatre commander and works for them. And so we were not involved, other than, in this case, there was some question over whether or not they should be put directly into Libya or not because of the sensitivities of what the situation in Libya was at this time. And so the Secretary wanted to make sure that whatever was sent there was going to be welcome and that this was not going to be an assault.

Q And can you just elaborate a little more on that discussion about whether or not to send the CIF directly to Benghazi versus sending it to an ISB?

A Again, as the timelines that we were looking at, it seemed abundantly clear that everybody was going to have departed Benghazi by the time anybody could arrive -- by the time the lift could arrive, they could load up, and they could fly -- just the time distance -- that they would not have been able to be there. Because everybody was moving out of Benghazi as quickly as they could.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q So does SOCOM set the N-hour or would it have been SOCEUR?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A The theatre commander that SOCEUR works for would have been setting whatever the response timeline was for his CIF.

Q [REDACTED]

A [REDACTED]

Q So it would have been General Votel.

A Yes.

Q Thank you.

A That sounds right.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q Continuing on in your email, the next paragraph, "SECDEF has directed FAST to make all preps to deploy, but hold departure until we are sure we have clearance to land in Tripoli."

I believe this reflects kind of what we were discussing earlier, that the concern was to make sure we have clearance.

A Correct.

Q And that is referring to diplomatic clearance, correct?

A Correct.

Q Then it goes on to say, "We'll work with State to nail that down, but intent is to get security force augmentation into Tripoli (not Benghazi, at least not initially) ASAP. Embassy making efforts to move all AMCITS from SAO Compound Benghazi to Tripoli, possibly using same Comm Air that 5-pax team arrived on."

And that is referring to what -- your understanding was that

[REDACTED]

everyone was going to be leaving Benghazi and heading to Tripoli?

A That's correct.

Q During the course of that evening, did you receive any additional information that may have changed that understanding about whether or not the individuals that had moved from the diplomatic compound to the Annex were actually going to be evacuated?

A We knew that the intent was that they be evacuated. My recollection -- and, again, here is where the subsequent knowledge that we all gained in the days and weeks following, exactly what transpired on the ground. So, I don't know that I can de-conflict what did I know at the time versus what I have subsequently learned.

So I am a little bit reluctant to say I absolutely knew at that time that it was exactly this. My recollection was we were waiting for them to move, waiting for them to move, waiting for them to move. Then we got this sporadic report that the compound had come under fire.

At the time, it was a very, I guess, an incomplete report. We didn't have a real clear understanding of what had come under fire. And then it was: They are moving now, they are going to the airport, they are at the airport.

And so, you know, it is not like you're watching a continuously evolving piece. It wasn't until I saw the Predator video that occurred over this long period of time that you began to kind of stitch together exactly what has happening on a minute-by-minute basis.

But at the time, you get a report, and then it may be 45 minutes, an hour later you get another piece of information. Then you don't

[REDACTED]

get anything. And you call and say: Hey, what's going on? Have they begun to move yet? Hold on. Wait. Then it works its way back up the chain.

So you have get very small packets of information spread out by a significant period of time where you're not hearing anything. And at the same time, we are trying to coordinate all the other various activities that are going on to make sure that we are wrestling with finding out why was it taking so long to get the airplanes generated from Ramstein down to the FAST, and when were they going to get there, and what was the timeline, and how were they going move, and where are they going to move to, and the business of uniforms, not uniforms.

You get bogged down in some of the things that ultimately end up being not -- they are the things that bog us down back here, but that weren't really affecting what was going on on the ground there in Tripoli.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Sir, I apologize if I missed this, but the comment in that long paragraph says "hold departure until we are sure we have clearance to land in Tripoli."

Is that hold departure from Rota or hold departure from ISB to Tripoli?

Do you recall?

A I don't recall. Like I said, my recollection was that those guys, when they finally left Rota, that they were going straight to Tripoli. I've forgotten. If you say they landed first at Sigonella,

[REDACTED]

okay. I just don't recall that. We just did not want them to be landing in Tripoli until we knew that they weren't going to get shot up by somebody on the runway.

Q Clearly, is it your understanding that General Ham had the authority to move from Rota to ISB? He had full carte blanche to do what he needed to do to get them prepared to go into Tripoli.

A I don't recall there ever being anything holding them up at Rota, other than if they needed civies, to make sure they had civies with them. Once we knew they had civies with them, it was get them moving.

Q And real quick, talking about General Ham versus Admiral Leidig.

A I didn't talk with General Ham. All my conversations were with Admiral Leidig.

Q My question is: Did you have an appreciation -- was Admiral Leidig running the show and advising the commander or was the commander trying to make decisions from the Pentagon and advising Leidig? Did you have an appreciation for that?

A I really don't. I don't know what was going on between Admiral Leidig and General Ham.

Ms. Clarke. So, we have about 2 minutes remaining. I think right now what we will do is take a break.

Admiral Tidd. Two minutes. I can go 2, if you want to.

Ms. Clarke. No, I think now is a good stopping point for us, sir, if that is okay for you, and we can take a break. And I am sure the

[REDACTED]

minority will have questions for you as well.

Thank you.

[Recess at 1:00 p.m.]

[REDACTED]

[2:22 p.m.]

Ms. Green. We can go back on the record.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. GREEN:

Q Sir, we're just gonna go back through some of the items that you discussed with my colleagues in the last hour.

And you mentioned at the beginning of this interview that your memory from the night of the attacks was a bit fuzzy, right?

A That's correct.

Q Understandably so.

A That's correct.

Q My memory of last week is fuzzy.

A Yeah. No, the problem that I have, honestly, is having -- having read the transcripts and the summaries and the after action reviews that we've been engaged in, trying to disaggregate what did I know then from the picture that I have today is the part that is -- I -- I just don't have a great deal of confidence that I can really distinguish between those two.

Q No, that's fair, sir.

And you had mentioned that you thought that the FAST platoon had gone directly from Rota into Libya, right?

A Right.

Q And my colleagues indicated to you that the FAST stopped at the intermediate staging base. And upon learning that, you speculated that the reason for that was because they were waiting for

[REDACTED]

diplomatic clearance, right?

A That's the only -- that's the -- yes, that's correct.
Correct.

Q Did anyone ever tell you that's why they were at the ISB?

A I don't recall that they stopped at the ISB.

Q And you don't know for a fact that they did, right?

A I -- no, I don't.

Q Did anyone ever tell you that seeking permission from Libya was going to slow down the FAST team?

A I don't -- the conversation was not -- it was how can we get them there as quickly as possible.

Q And, sir, we interviewed former Secretary Panetta, and he indicated to us -- and you probably know this from all of your operational experience -- that obtaining dip clearance and various other logistical items would happen in parallel to the forces deploying. Is that an accurate --

A That was typically the way that we would -- we would work.
And, in fact, in subsequent cases, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

So this was -- you know, it was fairly typical that if we -- the

[REDACTED]

only thing that we wanted to make sure that didn't happen was that we would send them someplace that they couldn't recover back to and run the plane out of gas while we were waiting for the final approval to occur.

BY MS. SACHSMAN GROOMS:

Q But just a specific point from the last round.

A Okay.

Q You have no memory that the FAST platoon stopped at an intermediate staging base, right?

A That's correct.

Q So I would assume, but I just want to just check with you, you have no memory that the FAST platoon was delayed because of waiting on the diplomatic clearance?

A I -- no. What I -- what I recall and refreshed by the email, was that was the one -- the one caveat of -- from the Secretary of Defense, basically, launch everything else, launch to the ISB, that was fine, but don't send it -- don't send the FAST into Tripoli until we were sure that they would be allowed to land in. That was the only -- kind of the only caveat that he placed on his approval to deploy those forces.

Q I'm sorry. I'm kind of beating a dead horse here, but just to be very clear, because I don't want, sort of, your speculative comment and the other one to be taken out of context.

A Okay.

Q You don't have any memory that that night there was a

decision to go to the intermediate staging base because you were waiting on diplomatic security -- clearance? Is that right?

A Correct. I do not recall that.

Q Okay.

BY MS. GREEN:

Q Actually, General Dempsey spoke to this in his Senate testimony. He was, you know, asked about whether country clearance delayed the FAST team. He said, quote, "I want to assure you, had we been able to -- there's been a whole bunch of speculation about were we risk averse. We needed the country's permission to come in. If we had been able to get there with anything, we'd have gone in there under the command of the commander of the U.S. Africa Command," end quote.

Do you have any reason to doubt General Dempsey's testimony?

A Never. The piece -- I think he specifically was talking about Benghazi in that -- in that specific instance, not Tripoli.

Q Yes, sir.

A On the evening, at the time that all of this was transpiring, our mindset, our sense was that everything was going to Tripoli, that no one was left -- or no one would be left in Benghazi. So that -- that's -- that was the mindset that we had.

BY MS. SACHSMAN GROOMS:

Q So just to close out some of the diplomatic clearance, I think you had explained in the last round that the request for diplomatic clearance was coming from -- originating in embassy

Tripoli? Was that your understanding?

A We were waiting -- I was waiting to hear from the Department of State -- I was not waiting. I was talking to the Department of State, basically. When they told me that it was okay, that the embassy at Tripoli said it was okay for them to land, that was -- that was what we were waiting for, was just for the embassy -- because they were trying to negotiate. They were trying to find somebody within the government of Libya to make sure that there would be no problems if we brought this -- because you can't bring a large armed military force into another country without having discussions with that government. It has to be invited in. That's not to say what General Dempsey was saying is if we thought we had the circumstances that -- that would warrant going in, that that would be the decision that would be made at a higher lever. It would not be made at the ambassador's level.

Q Well, sure. And obviously, going into Tripoli, although there's not a current attack on the embassy would be different than going into Benghazi, where there was an attack.

A Correct.

Q But I think in the previous round you had said something about the genesis for the interest in making sure that those who are entering Tripoli again, and not Benghazi, were in civilian gear and had clearance from -- diplomatic clearance from the country of Libya to enter, that part of the genesis from that was actually concerns on the ground from the embassy in Tripoli?

A That's correct.

Q Is that accurate?

A That's correct.

Q Okay. And were the concerns from the embassy on the ground in Tripoli, did you convey those around the department? Were those taken seriously?

A Yes. I mean, there was no reason not to take them seriously. We were very much interested in supporting the embassy and providing the embassy with what -- what they were asking for and getting it there as quickly as we possibly could to be able to -- to reinforce the embassy so that they would have the means that they needed in case what had happened at -- in Cairo when -- and in Tunis might be heading their way next.

Q And Embassy Tripoli had -- Embassy Tripoli was expressing that they also had concerns --

A Absolutely.

Q -- that something could occur there?

A Yes.

Q And was Embassy Tripoli expressing that they wanted you all to come as quickly as possible?

A They -- they wanted trigger pullers to reinforce the embassy as quickly as possible.

Q And so there were a series of, sort of, information coming out of Embassy Tripoli that you all were trying to factor into the actions that you were taking that night?

A Correct.

[REDACTED]

BY MS. GREEN:

Q We actually had the opportunity, sir, to interview the FAST commander of that team that went into Tripoli, and he confirmed to us that they switched in and out of uniforms to -- which is probably not all that unusual for like a specialized team. Is that right, sir?

A I -- yeah.

Q We asked him whether changing into civilian clothes interfered with his mission, and the Marine responded, quote, "Absolutely not," end quote.

And he went on to explain, similar to what you just explained, sir, about why the Libyan Government might not have wanted Marines in civilian attire. And I'm just gonna read you his quote: "Not to show that you have American Marines on the deck in the country outside of what seemed to be U.S. sovereign territory. So the outside impression is given of a Marine force on the ground in a foreign country is not the most welcoming presence. Concurrently, you've got Iraq racking up and Afghanistan going up. No one wants to be -- this is me kind of making up these answers why they don't want us in uniform. No one wants to be the next country that's got Marines coming in to do what Marines do," end quote.

A I think there is a refreshing candor from young Marine captains.

Q I think so, too, sir.

A I think you nailed it.

Q Sir, I'm going to direct your attention back to exhibit 3

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

that my colleagues introduced in the last hour.

And you mentioned, sir, that the N-hour is a synchronizing mechanism. Is it fair to say that setting the N-hour didn't slow the forces?

A Correct. It did not.

Q And once Secretary of Defense gave the orders to deploy, nothing stopped them from moving? Is that your --

A That's correct.

Q They weren't waiting for the N-hour?

A I am not aware that they were.

Q And, sir, exhibit 3 seems to be representing both the SVTCs call that you were on as well as a conference call with the National Military Command Center?

A Right.

Q And those were your folks that were running that?

A Right. Talking with the other military command centers.

Q And, sir, you responded to that email 14 minutes after you received it. And I just want to clarify that on page 3, the conference call essentially is laying out the orders from the Secretary of Defense. Is that right, sir?

A It is. That's correct. Move the CIF and then some requests, but, yes, it forwards the SECDEF's VOCO to move the FAST platoons. I'm just looking to see if there was a discussion.

[REDACTED]

Q And, sir, if I could direct you to the second page, your

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

email response. The third paragraph is about the FAST deployment.

A Correct.

Q Here, it says, the Secretary of Defense directed the FAST to make preparations to deploy but hold departure until we are sure we have country clearance to land in Tripoli.

But your email goes on to say, quote, "Intent is to get security force augmentation into Tripoli ASAP," end quote.

A Correct.

Q And the last sentence of that last paragraph reads, quote, "But the point is to get Marines on the ground securing the embassy in Tripoli as rapidly as we can move them," end quote.

So, sir, it appears, based on your email, that the plan was to send the FAST team as quickly as they could get there?

A That's correct.

Q So is it fair to say, sir, that obtaining Libyan country clearance, as we said, and deploying Marines as quickly as we can aren't mutually exclusive activities?

A No. No. They were -- the intent was they would be pursued simultaneously.

Q The last sentence, sir, of your email says, "Consider this authorization to move, we will follow up with depords ASAP."

A So this reinforced the VOCO orders that were passed previously. This provides reinforcement of that. The actual depords is a formal package of materials that's put together and presented, and the Secretary of Defense actually signs those. And so it's

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

a -- it's the paperwork that you follow up with to -- that formalizes the decisions that have already been made and communicated verbally.

Q But the verbal order was all that --

A Correct.

Q -- the forces needed?

A Correct.

Q Sir, when we interviewed Secretary Panetta, and we've asked a couple of others the same question, national, sort of, command authority, sort of a simple question, but it goes from the President to the Secretary of Defense, to the combatant commanders, right?

A Correct.

Q So there's a whole lot of interagency coordination that you and others were involved in, whether it's the SVTC or whatnot, but those interactions and discussions wouldn't change the orders given by the Secretary of Defense? Is that right?

A Correct.

Q In the last hour, you seemed to indicate that decisions were made at that SVTC that you participated in?

A Yeah. I guess what I would say is, obviously, there were lots of discussions about what was wanted, what was desired. And when you have the entire interagency participating and everyone agrees, including, obviously, the Secretary of Defense or that the DOD side, that's the most critical thing to us, but this is the coordination that occurs to make sure that there's nobody -- nobody's surprised and that everybody -- that nobody is in disagreement. But if the Secretary of

[REDACTED]

Defense tells us to do something, we do it. That's the -- that's our -- the military chain of command.

Q And that -- that is what happened on September 11th, 2012, sir?

A Correct.

Ms. Sachsman Grooms. That you got your orders from the Secretary of Defense?

Admiral Tidd. Correct.

Ms. Sachsman Grooms. Your orders didn't come from the White House or from the State Department?

Admiral Tidd. No. The orders came from the Secretary of Defense.

BY MR. KENNY:

Q I appreciate your patience, Admiral.

You mentioned in the last hour, coming out of that 7:30 SVTC, some of the do outs, or some of the taskers that were associated with that SVTC. You also described some of the members of the interagency, your sense -- for instance, I've written in my notes here that everybody wanted the forces that were discussed there instantaneously. You then followed up by saying that there were communications you had with individuals in the White House, individuals at the State Department following that meeting.

A Yeah. I did not speak to anyone in the White House that I recall. The only people I recall speaking with were -- now, I -- I attended the SVTC in which the discussions were occurring, but my

conversations were with people inside the Pentagon.

Q Okay. And I think that's a helpful clarification.

One of the things I had written in my notes is that you had said that individuals at the White House or State Department had contacted the Joint Staff to ask --

A Yeah.

Q -- our forces to move again.

A Yeah. No, I did -- let me change. I did have a phone call with -- I don't recall any longer -- it was one of the senior State Department individuals that was -- that was the point person for this crisis that was breaking. That she was -- was at the SVTC, and her name was passed -- and phone number was passed out, and I was just exchanging information with her. And that was -- my recollection was that was the phone call we were having over whether or not uniforms, no uniforms, how -- what's the fastest you can move. And we just all agreed that the key thing is to get them there as quickly as possible, the Marines, the FAST Marines.

Q Thank you. So it was your sense, then, in that discussion and other discussions you may have been briefed or informed about with the State Department that the State Department wanted forces there instantaneously? That was -- that continued throughout the evening?

A Yes. That was correct.

Ms. Sachsman Grooms. And in your discussions with the State Department about changing into civilian clothes and other things, was -- was the request from the State Department -- were those all

subordinate to the interests from the State Department that the forces get there as quickly as possible?

Admiral Tidd. That was my sense. It was from a security perspective that, I think, they were thinking of not moving uniformed Marines at night in buses through the -- you know -- or, actually, in the early hours of the morning through downtown Tripoli to the embassy. And so I think that the only question I had was, okay, if it comes down to a question of with uniforms or without uniforms, is it more important to move them quickly? The answer was, yes, get them there quickly.

Ms. Sachsman Grooms. And that's the answer from the State Department?

Admiral Tidd. Correct.

BY MR. KENNY:

Q And at the time, that discussion centered on Embassy Tripoli with respect to the FAST? Is that correct?

A It was only about Tripoli at that point.

Q At that point. And that is again, because?

A Their concern that there might be similar riots and unrest that had occurred in Cairo and Tunis and in Benghazi.

Q And at the point in time of those discussions, your understanding was that the personnel in Benghazi was set to evacuate?

A They were either -- they were either on their way out or had left. And I didn't have a clear idea of how long it was going to finally take them, the last flight to leave. It was only -- you know, retrospective, we learned that last flight ended up taking a lot longer

[REDACTED]

than we thought.

Q Yes, sir.

BY MS. SACHSMAN GROOMS:

Q Even with the last flight taking longer than you all thought that it would have, would there have been any way to get forces into Benghazi before that happened? I guess my point is, the forces still weren't ready and moving, right?

A I mean the -- what we weren't sure at the time, and the reason we were -- we were asking for two FAST platoons, we weren't sure if we were going to be moving one platoon to Benghazi, one platoon to Tripoli. The more we learned, the more it became evident nobody was going to be left in Benghazi, that everybody was moving into Tripoli and consolidate there. And so the decision was, let's keep the two platoons moving in this direction, and if we need to put them someplace else, we can put them someplace else. Because, again, we -- things were moving quickly at a number of different embassies and, frankly, we weren't sure at that point where we were going to need them next.

Q Got it. And if the FAST platoon had been ready, and there were people on the ground still in Benghazi, would you have sent them to Benghazi -- I mean, the order was set up originally to send them to Benghazi?

A Yeah. And part of that, we just didn't know what the situation was on the ground, where we -- was there a static situation, and we were defending? Were they moving from -- I mean, pretty early on, my recollection was that the intent was that they leave Benghazi,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and that they move from Benghazi back to Tripoli. And so, again, you know, FAST platoon is not -- that's not the kind of a unit that you would use to go in and either do an assault or anything else. They would -- they would be a unit that you would send in to set up a protective perimeter and then be able to conduct either a -- you know, ordered departure or something else from.

But as we got the word that -- that they were moving towards the airport, I think pretty quickly the thinking shifted to, okay, you know, we are not going to reinforce Benghazi, because nobody's going to be left there.

Q Can you speak a little to the FEST, the F-E-S-T?

A Yeah.

Q I think you said the interest was in getting trigger pullers to Libya, and so the idea of the FEST was dismissed pretty early on. Did you agree with that decision? Can you talk a little about that?

A Yeah, I just -- what I did was review the types of units that in a -- in an [REDACTED] kind of crisis that could be made available, and that there was -- I mean, there was the -- if you -- if you can get there ahead of a crisis breaking out, you send in a FAST platoon to reinforce, provide us a static defense around a fixed site. If you think you've got a hostage rescue or some other dynamic type of a situation, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The FEST was -- if you -- if you are going to be conducting some sort of a crisis response activity within a sovereign nation, in order to provide a team of subject matter experts who understand exactly what the employment of this team is, a FEST is an interagency team led by somebody of ambassadorial level and that with members of State Department, intelligence community, and military, and sometimes law enforcement as well and communicators and other sorts of folks to be able to expand the capacity of an embassy to be able to deal with a crisis type of a situation.

And there are instances when you deploy the [REDACTED] package that you consider also deploying the FEST to be able to augment the embassy to be able to deal with what might be going on. But the decision was made at that evening's SVTC that, no, they did not need the FEST. What they wanted was they wanted trigger pullers.

And although there's a small number of military personnel in that FEST, it is not -- typically, it's not considered a trigger-pulling outfit.

Q Is that because the FEST would be used to augment --

A The embassy.

Q -- the embassy, and instead, they were evacuating?

A Well, we didn't know. I mean, we just -- we didn't know, and I think they weren't even sure at that point. What they didn't

[REDACTED]

██████████

want to do was increase the number of people inside the embassy that should, you know, a -- a requirement come to draw down the number of people in the embassy, that they would then bring people in and have to turn around and bring them right back out again.

Q And especially they didn't want to increase the number of people that they would have to evacuate that were nontrigger pullers?

A Correct.

BY MS. GREEN:

Q Sir, since the Benghazi attacks, there's been sort of multiple allegations that somehow the Defense Department was told to stand down, whether it was, you know, Secretary Clinton telling Secretary Panetta. On your SVTC or throughout the night, did anyone ever indicate that you should stand down?

A I don't -- I don't recall hearing anybody saying stand down. I've read the same allegations, the same stories, and I -- I don't know where that came from.

Q Did anyone ever indicate to you that you should slow the response of the military to --

A No.

Mr. Kenny. Sir, you were asked a series of questions about the status of the CIF throughout the evening of September 11th and the morning of September 12th.

As far as the alert posture, the posture of that CIF and their movements on the night of the attacks, who would be best positioned to answer those questions for the committee?

██████████

██████████

Admiral Tidd. I think the theater Special Operations commander, which in that instance, I think they were still under -- under European command, so the SOCEUR commander probably would have the best.

Mr. Kenny. Okay. Thank you.

BY MS. GREEN:

Q We also had the opportunity, sir, to interview the commander of that CIF, and he explained to us sort of the difference between responding in extremis to deliberative planning. And from what, in his scope of understanding, once the ambassador was deceased, sort of -- he indicated that, essentially the N-hour became irrelevant, because they were doing deliberative planning at that point. Does that resonate with you?

A That makes sense. And, again, it was just because we didn't know what we didn't know. We didn't know what -- what was going on at that point, so --

Q And by staging forces at the ISB, was that because of the other threats driving in the region?

A We -- we knew we needed to get a very flexible, capable package with a loss of capacity a lot closer to the problem than what we currently had, and we wanted to put them someplace where they could all be colocated and do the kinds of planning, share the information and make sure they had the best possible information available to them. And so once it became pretty clear that we did not have an immediate hostage rescue situation going on, it -- our thinking was, get them all here together and then -- and then see what comes next and be ready

██████████

[REDACTED]

to be able to respond to what comes next.

In fact, we did end up getting some requests from the embassy in Tunis for augmentation of security personnel. And at that time the decision was made to use Special Operations forces to do that instead of Marines because of hypersensitivity of the embassy in Tunis to having Marines come in in a FAST platoon. They wanted a lower profile perspective, because they had already been, I think, assaulted one time.

Q Sir, Major General Darryl Roberson has testified a number of times to Congress about the Benghazi attacks. Did he work for you or with you?

A He was the vice director for operations. Darryl Roberson, yeah.

Q One of the things he said in his testimony, and sounds similar to what you just said is, quote, "With respect to the CIF, was it properly used, or what we should've, could've, would've done with that, the very next day, 19 of those 30 people ended up in Tunis, a compound that was compromised by protestors. That security was breached, and the only force we could get in there without fighting our way in was the Special Operations force to protect those grounds," end quote.

And then he went on to say that, you know, four people died in Libya, and four people did not die in Tunis. Essentially, because they were stationed at the ISB, they were able to deploy and secure those grounds.

[REDACTED]

Is that a fair assessment, that staging at the ISB enabled them to get there to respond as well as to other places in the region?

A That is true. I mean, that was specifically why we put them into an ISB so that we could respond much more quickly. Basically, we were helicopter range away from three of the key countries that -- that looked like we were -- had some of the more significant problems with.

We did not -- on the night of the 10th, we did not have those same forces in helicopter range of key countries, and so we could not get them in.

Q Sir, on the night of the attacks, was it your sense that everyone was doing everything they could to respond to keep Americans safe?

A I believe that, yes.

Q Everyone at the Pentagon?

A I believe that.

Q Everyone at the White House?

A I believe that.

Q And folks at the State Department?

A That is my belief.

Q And was it your sense from the SVTC and other interactions that folks were doing everything they could to --

A There was an enormous sense of urgency to try to sort through all of the conflicting information that we were getting and had been getting. And -- and, yes, I think everyone was doing everything they

[REDACTED]

could to try to sort through that -- the conflicting information and to make the best possible decisions that they could.

Q Does it seem that the forces that were deployed that night, [REDACTED]]CIF and the two FAST platoons, that seems to show the gravity with which the U.S. Government was responding.

A Given the information that we had at the time, those were, without a doubt, the premiere, most capable forces that we had to deal with a highly chaotic and uncertain situation. And we needed to send the best possible eyes and ears forward, not knowing what we were going to be dealing with to people that sort of -- the people who would be on the ground would be the most capable of making the right decisions in a very critical time-compressed environment. They were the best trained that we had for that kind of a situation.

Q And just to be very clear, did the Secretary of State ever tell you or anyone at DOD to stand down?

A I never heard that from her.

Q Did the President ever tell you or anyone at the Department to stand down or slow the response?

A I never communicated with the President.

Q During his appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 7th, 2013, General Dempsey testified that, quote, "I want to make just one comment related to your chronology, because I think it's important. Once we started moving forces, nothing stopped us, nothing slowed us down. The only adaptation we thought about

[REDACTED]

making was for a period of time we thought we were going to be entering a hostage rescue, because we didn't know where the ambassador was. But once we started moving forces, they didn't slow, they didn't stop," end quote.

A I agree with that.

Q There's also been this criticism of the Department of Defense for not sending in fighter aircraft into Benghazi on the night of the attacks. Have you heard that criticism, sir?

A Many times.

Q Despite three and a half years and now the eighth congressional investigation, some continue to criticize the fact that the U.S. military didn't send that type of asset.

This committee heard from Admiral Winnefeld, who was adamant that fighter aircraft would not have been the appropriate response. And Major General Roberson also testified to this before the Armed Services Committee on May 21st, 2013. And he said, sir, quote, "There are many factors that go into employing weapons on the ground. And having flown in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is absolutely critical that we know where we are dropping these bombs and who we are going to kill. There was no JTAC on the ground. We had no way of contacting people on the ground from the airplane, from the pilot's perspective. There was no way to be able to affect with weapons on the ground. We didn't know who was friendly and who was enemy. There was no way that we could have been able to drop weapons in that environment from a drone or from an airplane."

Do you agree with General Roberson's perspective?

A Yeah. General Roberson and Admiral Winnefeld are, both, two supremely qualified tactical aviators, who've actually dropped ordnance from airplanes in combat. And I would be the last person to second guess them, but I would agree entirely with -- with their evaluation.

Q Major General Roberson also stated, sir, quote, "We don't have assets to respond like a fire call, jump down the pole and respond for any American that is under fire anywhere in the world," end quote.

A You know, we went back and we took a hard look. I will be honest, it did not come to my mind that that was something that we ought to consider doing. As we went back through it and we looked, we had no forces that were positioned or postured or on an alert status that would have been able to have responded had we had JTACs on the ground, had we known exactly what the situation was, who the friendlies, who the unfriendlies were. The reality was, we did not have armed aircraft that were in a position to have responded, period.

Q Sir, General Ham testified that even if we did have armed aircraft, it would not have been the right tool given the environment.

A I would not second guess him in that one at all. Let me be more emphatic. I agree with General Ham. Okay?

Ms. Green. We can go off the record.

(Discussion held off the record.)

Ms. Green. Back on the record

BY MS. GREEN:

Q Sir, I'm going to ask you a series of questions, and we ask these of every witness, because of the many allegations that continue to perpetuate surrounding the Benghazi attacks.

While anyone can speculate about the Benghazi attacks, and plenty of people have, only a limited number of people have actual knowledge or evidence of what happened before, during, and after the attacks. So what I'm asking, sir, is whether you have any firsthand information or knowledge. And bear with me, please.

It has been alleged that Secretary of State Clinton intentionally blocked military action on the night of the attacks. One Congressman has speculated that, quote, "Secretary Clinton told Leon Panetta to stand down," end quote, and this resulted in the Defense Department not sending more assets to help in Benghazi.

Do you have any evidence that Secretary of State Clinton ordered Secretary of Defense Panetta to stand down on the night of the attacks?

A No.

Q Do you have any evidence that Secretary of State Clinton issued any kind of order to Secretary of Defense Panetta on the night of the attacks?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that Secretary Clinton personally signed an April 2012 cable denying security to Libya. The Washington Post fact checker evaluated this claim and gave it four Pinocchios, its highest award for false claims.

Do you have any evidence that Secretary Clinton personally signed

[REDACTED]

an April 2012 cable denying security resources to Libya?

A No.

Q Do you have any evidence that Secretary Clinton was personally involved in providing specific instruction on day-to-day security resources in Benghazi?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that Secretary Clinton misrepresented or fabricated intelligence on the risks posed by Qadhafi to his own people in order to garner support for a military operation in Libya in the spring of 2011.

Do you have any evidence that Secretary Clinton misrepresented or fabricated intelligence on the risk posed by Qadhafi to his own people in order to garner support for military operations in Libya in the spring of 2011?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that the U.S. mission in Benghazi included transferring weapons to Syrian rebels or to other countries. A bipartisan report issued by the House Armed Services Select Committee on Intelligence found that, quote, "The CIA was not collecting and shipping arms from Libya to Syria," end quote, and they found no support for this allegation.

Do you have any evidence to contradict the House Intelligence Committee's bipartisan report finding that the CIA was not shipping arms from Libya to Syria?

A No.

[REDACTED]

Q Do you have any evidence that the U.S. facilities in Benghazi were being used to facilitate weapons transfers from Libya to Syria or to any other foreign country?

A No.

Q A team of CIA security personnel was temporarily delayed from departing the Annex to assist the Special Mission Compound. And there have been a number of allegations about the cause of and the appropriateness of that delay. The House Intelligence Committee issued a bipartisan report concluding that the team was not ordered to stand down, but that, instead, there were tactical disagreements on the ground over how quickly to depart.

Do you have any evidence that would contradict the House Intelligence Committee's finding that there was no stand-down order to CIA personnel?

A No.

Q Putting aside whether you personally agree with the decision to delay temporarily or think it was the right decision, do you have any evidence that there was a bad or improper reason behind the temporary delay of the CIA security personnel who departed the Annex to assist the Special Mission Compound?

A No.

Q A concern has been raised by one individual that in the course of producing documents to the Accountability Review Board, damaging documents may have been removed or scrubbed out of that production.

[REDACTED]

Do you have any evidence that anyone at the State Department removed or scrubbed damaging documents from the materials that were provided to the ARB?

A No.

Q Do you have any evidence that anyone at the State Department directed anyone else at the State Department to remove or scrub damaging documents from the materials that were provided to the ARB?

A No.

Q Let me ask these questions for documents that were provided to Congress.

Do you have any evidence that anyone at the State Department removed or scrubbed damaging documents from the materials that were provided to Congress?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell altered unclassified talking points about the Benghazi attacks for political reasons, and that he then misrepresented his actions when he told Congress that the CIA, quote, "faithfully performed our duties in accordance with the highest standards of objectivity and nonpartisanship," end quote.

Do you have any evidence that CIA Deputy Director Mike Morell gave false or intentionally misleading testimony to Congress about the Benghazi talking points?

A No.

[REDACTED]

[3:14 p.m.]

BY MS. GREEN:

Q Do you have any evidence that CIA Deputy Director Morell altered the talking points provided to Congress for political reasons?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that Ambassador Susan Rice made an intentional misrepresentation when she spoke on the Sunday talk shows about the Benghazi attacks.

Do you have any evidence that Ambassador Rice intentionally misrepresented facts about the Benghazi attacks on the Sunday talk shows?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that the President of the United States was virtually AWOL as Commander in Chief on the night of the attacks and that he was missing in action.

Do you have any evidence to support the allegation that the President was virtually AWOL as Commander in Chief or missing in action on the night of the attacks?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that a team of four military personnel at Embassy Tripoli on the night of the attacks who were considering flying on the second plane to Benghazi were ordered by their superiors to stand down, meaning to cease all operations. Military officials have stated that those four individuals were, instead, ordered to remain in place in Tripoli to provide security and medical assistance

[REDACTED]

in their current location.

A Republican staff report issued by the House Armed Services Committee found that, quote, "There was no stand down order issued to U.S. military personnel in Benghazi who sought to join the fight in Benghazi," end quote.

Do you have any evidence to contradict the conclusion of the House Armed Services Committee that there was no stand down order issued to U.S. military personnel in Tripoli who sought to join the fight in Benghazi?

A No.

Q It has been alleged that the military failed to deploy assets on the night of the attack that would have saved lives. However, former Republican Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon, the former chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, conducted a review of the attacks, after which he stated, quote, "Given where the troops were, how quickly the thing all happened, and how quickly it dissipated, we probably couldn't have done more than we did," end quote.

Do you have any evidence to contradict Congressman McKeon's conclusion?

A No.

Q Do you have any evidence that the Pentagon had military assets available to them on the night of the attacks that could have saved lives, but that the Pentagon leadership intentionally decided not to deploy them?

A No.

[REDACTED]

[Discussion off the record.]

Mr. Tolar. Let's go back on the record, please.

EXAMINATION BY MR. TOLAR

Q Sir, if you would, remind me again of your timeframe for your billet as the J3. What period of time was that, approximately?

A From the summer of 2012 until approximately the late fall of 2013. About 15 months. So, yeah, 2013.

Q And what was the subsequent billet?

A Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Q Talk to me briefly about your responsibilities in that billet.

A Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the Chairman's liaison to the Secretary of State.

Q In that billet, were you privy to discussions about deployment of forces and things of that nature?

A To the extent that, as a member of the staff -- the Joint Staff -- yes. Not to the same level of detail as I had when I was the J3. I guess -- that is what I said.

Q [Captain ██████████] was the DDO. Briefly tell me, please, what the DDO does?

A The DDO is the duty officer. So there is the senior officer on watch. It is always either a flag or general officer or a flag or general officer select. As the J3, he is my watch standard on call 24/7.

Q Is it your understanding that once the COCOM commander,

[REDACTED]

General Ham, received authority from Secretary Panetta following the White House meeting, did you believe that General Ham required any additional authority to deploy assets?

A He was not involved in the decision [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] That came from the Secretary of Defense, and it was then provided to him to be used. So at that point, he had it. The decision on how it might be employed once we got past the initial crisis then became a matter of discussion back and forth.

So he could -- it would have been unlikely that he would have, on his own, without discussing it with the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense, employed it in ways like putting it ashore into specific countries, things like that, using it in ways that it might be considered unusual.

As a matter of routine, he would discuss those different concepts about pieces of it might be deployed -- might be employed once it was actually deployed.

Q But is it accurate to say that he had all the authority he needed to move all those assets to the ISB?

A To the ISB, yes. Yes.

Q And that authority was established -- you're saying that authority was established when Secretary Panetta told him in a VOCO following the White House meeting.

A The VOCO deployed the force and put them under the operational command of the theatre combatant commander. And that was

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

subsequently formalized in the formal deployment order.

Q Yes, sir.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q Just for clarification, the VOCO -- when you're referring to VOCO, if you look at the first exhibit that was handed out -- the timeline -- at what point in time on that timeline is the VOCO?

A Early evening of the 11th.

Q So on the timeline, between 6 and 8 p.m., after Secretary Panetta convened the meeting, and it says "provides verbal authorization for the following actions." That is the first page of the timeline. That's when you're referring to the VOCO?

A That's correct.

Q At that point is when Ham had the authority to move assets, if he desired to, to intermediate staging bases.

A That's correct. He had the authority to move the forces that he owned. The forces that were owned by the European Command Commander was chopped to him when they arrived at the ISB. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was placed under his command once it arrived there at the ISB.

Q When did the European Command commander have the authority to move the forces --

A He was directed to do it at the same time. That CIF -- basically, the CIF was transferred from European Command to AFRICOM, and then they made a decision to move it there.

Q And that occurred at the same time?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Yes.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q During your discussions that night with either Admiral Leidig or Admiral Landholt, did either of those gentlemen make any kind of request to you for additional support or anything at all?

A We were discussing, going over in our minds what other possible ISR resources might be made available, trying to figure out what we had that might be diverted or might be shifted from another theatre, and couldn't come up with anything that resulted in an ask.

We considered different types of things and then ruled them out because either they couldn't get there in time or they really wouldn't be suitable for the situation that we thought we were dealing with at the time.

Q At the time, did you have an appreciation -- would the NMCC have an appreciation or understanding of what the SOC assets were, generally, in that AOR?

A In general terms, the CIF, yes.

Q ISR assets. I apologize.

A No. We knew that was being employed in the CT mission that was going on at the time in North Africa, yes. It was a very small slice. They didn't have a whole lot of resources available. It was the Predator and periodically a P-3 and I think a couple of other platforms, but they did not have a continuous, long-term dwell kind of a capability to stare like we had in some of the other theatres.

Q Did the NMCC have an understanding -- realtime

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

understanding of what those assets that the SOC possessed that were in the area?

A Not ahead of time, no, because we would not have been engaged -- at the NMCC, we would not be involved in the tactical employment of those sensors themselves.

Q Explain to me why that is the case.

A That is the role of the theatre commander, the tactical employment of resources and forces.

Q Talk to me briefly about the criteria that is considered in the establishment of an N-hour, to the extent that you're able to. Not necessarily on this night per se, but just in general.

A [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] an N-hour is be established, and that is the timeframe that is used as kind of the central synchronizing point where a series of actions then will occur based on that N-hour.

Q Did you work -- how often did you work with Dr. Miller, the OSD policy gentleman?

A A fairly routine basis.

Q Talk to me briefly about his billet and what he did, to the extent that you know.

A He was the principal policy officer within the -- policy assistant to the Secretary and the Under Secretary of Defense, in terms of somewhat analogous -- he was the person who attended the Deputies Committee meetings as a general rule, and he was the senior person

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

engaging with the National Security Advisor, Deputy National Security Advisor, senior members of the National Security Council staff.

And so, in activities as the director of operations, typically, I would -- when I would provide information or updates of an operational nature, in addition to keeping the senior military assistant to the Secretary of Defense, senior military assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and I would keep Dr. Miller also -- he would be on that line, along with the Chairman and Vice Chairman and people on the Joint Staff chain.

Q On the night of the attack, did he engage at all in the civies versus utilities discussion?

A I don't recall him being part of that discussion, no.

Q Were you aware --

A I don't think that discussion really involved anybody in the Secretary or OSD. My recollection, it literally was making sure that the Department of State, and specifically the embassy, was happy with how they were going to be arriving to facilitate their moving safely and securely through the city to the embassy.

Q Yes, sir.

Sir, on the night of the attack, were you aware at the time that there was a C-17 and crew on BRAVO alert status at Ramstein?

A No. I was not.

Q For what it's worth, this is the crew that actually conducted the Medevac from Tripoli.

A From Tripoli back to Landstuhl.

[REDACTED]

Q Yes, sir.

A Okay.

Q At the time, you weren't aware?

A No.

Q Thank you. There were some discussions -- apparently, there were some discussions about how fixed wing aircraft might have been employed. Were you familiar with those discussions, in terms of a three-phased deployment?

Let me be more specific. So, apparently there were discussions about a three-phased deployment of fixed wing aircraft. The first phase included a high-speed pass at 8,000 to 10,000 feet. The second phase included dropping flares over the compound. And the third phase included possibly shooting rounds into the field next to the Annex.

Were you aware of those discussions?

A No.

Q Were you aware of the discussions between General Ham and the ambassador about the lack of a SOFA agreement and the extension of the SST team in Tripoli?

A Yes. To the extent that -- we knew that it was a matter of discussion in order to regularize the U.S. military presence and get it translated over into a Marine Security Guard, which was the standard procedure for embassies -- at our embassies around the world.

Q I apologize. Could you elaborate on that for me?

A Obviously, at some point -- when you establish an embassy, at some point you want to be able to get a Marine Security Guard

as -- that is the standard footprint that we have to provide security for the classified material at the embassy.

We did not yet have a Marine Security Guard. We had a series -- from going all the way back to the original movement and establishment of the embassy, we had Special Operations Forces. That is not a traditional mission for Special Operations Forces.

And so it was -- I guess at some point we knew that eventually we would get the embassy in Tripoli translated over into a standard footprint. We just didn't know when. I knew that there had been a series of -- prior to my taking over as the J3, we had gone through a series of extensions of a Special Operations Force capability. And with each extension with a question that went to the State Department and ultimately to the embassy, of: Okay, what is required in order to translate this from this nonstandard Special Operations Force over to a Marine Security Guard?

Q Who at the Joint level would be the point on all those discussions?

A It was a discussion because the force, I think, was sourced out of -- initially out of AFRICOM, and then out of the Joint Force management process. It would take a formal extension by an op ord in order to continue to use a Special Operations Force deployed into Libya for this purpose.

Q Sir, I apologize. What I am trying to get at, is in order to make the transition from an SST to an MSG, who at the J level would be the one saying, Hey, we need to get an MSG in there, or words to

that effect?

A With my predecessor as the J3 and me as the J3, it was: Okay, this is a nonstandard situation. And the question was: When do we shift it over to a standard one? What are the requirements, what are the tripwires -- not tripwires, but maybe it's the conditions required in order to do that?

And it was just continued -- I think my recollection was three or four times that it continued on as a Special Operations Force as opposed to a -- which is not exactly what they are trained for, not the mission set that they are -- that is not why we have Special Operations Forces.

Q What were the challenges that prevented the transition to the MSG?

A I don't recall. It was just a series of -- that the ambassador felt that he wanted to continue to use to have access to the Special Operations Force as opposed to a Marine Security Guard. And I don't recall the specifics.

Q Do you recall the evacuation of the Tripoli -- embassy in Tripoli in June or July of 2014?

A I do.

Q How involved were you in -- obviously, not in the planning per se -- but do you recall when the planning for that evacuation commenced?

A The minute we put the initial large slug of people in there -- the large security force -- it was -- as I recall, it was a

[REDACTED]

company-plus size of Marines that went in there in order to expand the perimeter and to provide adequate security to the embassy in the Tripoli. And, literally, the first time they went in there, they began talking about, okay if you had to pull out, how would you do it? And the subsequent successive draw-down of the embassy personnel until it reached the point where it was a relatively small percentage of the total force that was there were embassy people doing diplomatic work as opposed to security personnel safeguarding the perimeter.

Q Do you recall what your level of understanding was of what options were presented in terms of evacuating that embassy, whether it is by land, by sea, by air, et cetera?

A I remember we looked at the options. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Do you recall the actual evacuation and the type of assets that were involved?

A I was trying to remember if I had shifted over to the ACJCS at that point or not. Because I don't recall the specific details. I just remember when it happened and closed down.

[REDACTED]

Q At the time, there was a lot of turmoil in the Middle East. Were there any discussions at the Joint level about the posture of DOD at that time? Especially as we rolled up on 9/11, were there any discussions about perhaps ramping up our posture, given what was going on in that area?

A Every year as we come up on 9/11 we take a hard look at the security situation, look at the security threats on a global basis, and put out a standard warning. Having done this every year since 2001 -- I was in the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, so I have got some personal experience with it -- we look all around the world.

We have come to recognize that if terrorists want to conduct an attack, they will conduct an attack at the time that suits them, not necessarily to coincide with a specific date. So, over the years, I think it became -- you paid close attention to it, but you did not focus exclusively on that. You had to pay attention every day of the year, but you couldn't afford to hone in on any one single day.

We had significant unrest that had been occurring for a number of weeks, but it was something that we were paying very close attention to, and it was primarily in CENTCOM, but beginning to occur in North Africa as well. We were watching that closely.

I think my recollection at the time, I was more concerned about what was going on in Cairo than I was thinking about what might possibly happen in Libya. That was not on my scope.

Q And was there any discussion about ramping up the posture to respond in Cairo?

[REDACTED]

A Cairo had a -- we took a hard look at what they had for a security situation and the folks that they had. And CENTCOM had a pretty robust QRF capability that was under their direct operational control -- an ability to respond -- plus, we had I think some degree of belief that the authorities in Egypt would provide adequate protection to the diplomatic facilities there.

Q Did you have an understanding of what capabilities that existed in Libya in order to respond or were capable to respond?

A No. I will be honest, I did not before the night of the 11th.

Q Were you aware of the Special Mission Compound in Benghazi prior to the attack?

A No.

Q Were you aware of the Annex in Benghazi prior to the attack?

A No.

Q Sir, that is all I have.

Ms. Clarke. I just have a couple of questions.

BY MS. CLARKE:

Q I think earlier you mentioned that you were talking with someone at the State Department, and you indicated that it may have been a woman, regarding questions about the uniforms and whether that would trump moving the assets as fast as possible.

Do you recall if that individual was Beth Jones?

A It might have been. I won't swear to it. Can I say that here?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

That sounds familiar. It might have been her.

Q I know we just discussed a couple of times this afternoon the deployment of the FEST. Who actually makes that decision? Is that a State Department call or is that a Joint call?

A Ultimately, the Secretary of Defense has a piece of the call, but it is at the request of the State Department. And I have got to go pull out -- I haven't reviewed a copy of the 0300 op order in awhile -- in which it is contained in there -- but it may in fact be that even the National Security Advisor gets a piece of it. But don't quote me on that. I am not sure about that piece.

Obviously, it is at the request of the embassy, through the State Department, over to DOD, and then the Secretary of Defense has the authority to -- or has to agree to deploy the aircraft that carry the FEST.

EXAMINATION BY MR. KENNY

Q Sir, just a moment ago with my colleagues you had indicated that at some point in the discussion about whether to transition to a Marine Security Guard detachment approach at Embassy Tripoli, you mentioned that the Ambassador felt that he wanted access to the SOF team that was present in country. I just wanted to ask if you recall the timeframe when that discussion took place.

A I think this was an ongoing discussion that had taken place over -- every time it came time to renew the deployment order for that Special Operations Force to execute that mission, it was revisited. The question would go out and they would come back and say: No, it

[REDACTED]

is still not time yet to transition over to a Marine Security Guard.

Q At the time that you became the director of operations, the SST, the team --

A This question had been visited on a couple of occasions at least, and my recollection was it was probably about time to revisit it yet again. It was on a recurring -- I don't recall any longer whether it was a 90-day or -- but we had to go back and reauthorize the deployment periodically.

Q So when you say that the ambassador felt at the time that he wanted continued access to the SOF, was that information that was conveyed to you directly by the AMBASSADOR?

A No. Again, this is just in the staffing of the package of: Do we renew or do we not renew the deployment order of the SOF package, the SOF personnel. I did not communicate -- I have never communicated directly with the ambassador. Just what came to us was now State says: You need to keep it.

Q Okay. Your recollection of those discussions is those occurred at some point prior to you assuming --

A It had been ongoing I mean literally since the establishment of the embassy or the reestablishment of the embassy after operations the year before.

Q Okay.

Ms. Green. I think that is all we have.

Mr. Tolar. Just one followup on that. I apologize, sir, but do you recall why the ambassador felt like it wasn't time to make the

transition? I mean, what about the SST did they prefer over an MSG?

Admiral Tidd. I would be speculating. I don't want to put words in a dead man's mouth.

Mr. Kiko. I just have one question. Was it one ambassador or was it more than one ambassador?

Admiral Tidd. I don't know. I don't know when the ambassadors turned over.

Mr. Tolar. Sir, who was your predecessor?

Admiral Tidd. As the director of operations?

Mr. Tolar. Yes, sir.

Admiral Tidd. General Miller.

Mr. Tolar. Sir, on behalf of Chairman Gowdy and the committee, we appreciate your time today. We appreciate your service. Thank you very much.

[Where upon, at 3:42 p.m., the interview was adjourned.]



Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

Witness Name

Date



Errata Sheet

Select Committee on Benghazi

Department of Defense counsel on behalf of the witness reviewed the accompanying transcript, certified its accuracy, and declined to provide corrections to the transcript.