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Classification Key:

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EXECUTIVE SESSION

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,

joint with

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS,

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: VICE ADMIRAL CHARLES J. "JOE" LEIDIG, JR.

Thursday, March 20, 2014

Washington, D.C.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The interview in the above matter was held at Room 2203, Rayburn House office Building, commencing at 10 a.m.

[REDACTED]

Participant Key

AR = Armed Services Committee Republican staffer

AD = Armed Services Committee Democratic staffer

OR = Oversight and Government Reform Committee Republican staffer

OD = Oversight and Government Reform Committee Democratic staffer

[REDACTED]

OR2 [REDACTED] On the record, please.

Good morning. This is a transcribed interview of Vice Admiral Charles "Joe" Leidig, Jr. Welcome, and thank you for coming today.

Those in the room have already introduced themselves, and the record of our proceedings will show who is in attendance. However, for the record, I am [REDACTED]

OR2 [REDACTED] professional staff member with the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

As you may know, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on Armed Services are among the committees in the U.S. House of Representatives that are investigating many aspects of the attacks on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya, in September of 2012. The topics being considered include how the U.S. Government was prepared in advance of these attacks, how it responded once the attacks started, and what changes have been instituted as a result of lessons learned.

I am joined today by colleagues representing the chairmen and ranking minority members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on Armed Services. In order to simplify our proceedings, I am making these introductory remarks and will start the questioning, but please understand that this interview is an equal and joint effort of both committees.

We will proceed in the following way. I and a representative of the other committee's chairman will ask questions for the first hour. Then representatives of the ranking minority members will have an hour to pose questions. We will alternate this way until our questions are completed. We will recess for a short lunch and take other breaks, but please let us know when we are switching questioners if you need some additional time for any reason.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

During our questioning we will aim to have only one questioner at a time. An exception to this may occur if an additional staff member requires a follow-up or a clarification. In such an instance it's usually most efficient to do that as we proceed rather than at the end.

Because obviously the transcriptionist cannot record gestures, we ask that you answer orally. If you forget to do this, the transcriptionist may remind you to do so. The transcriptionist may also ask you to spell certain terms or unusual phrases or acronyms that you will likely use in your answers.

We hope to proceed methodically and generally chronologically. Some of our questions might appear to be basic, but this is done to help us clearly establish facts and to clearly understand the situation in Libya. We ask that you give complete and fulsome replies to questions based on your best recollections. Please provide unclassified information to the greatest extent possible. If it is necessary to provide classified information in response to questions, everyone in this room is cleared to the Top Secret level, and therefore you should not hesitate to provide relevant information or details up to that classification level. Furthermore, if a question is unclear or if you are uncertain in your response, please let us know. If you don't remember the answer to a question, simply say so.

You should also understand that although this interview is not under oath, by law you are required to answer questions from Congress truthfully, including questions posed by staffers in interviews such as this. Do you understand these circumstances?

Admiral Leidig. Yes.

OR2 [REDACTED] Is there any reason you are unable to provide your own truthful answers to today's questions?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Admiral Leidig. No.

OR2 [REDACTED] Pursuant to an agreement between the Armed Services and Oversight and Government Reform Committees and the Department of Defense, a transcript of today's proceedings will be provided to the Department as soon as it is prepared. The Department will confirm that the transcript contains Top Secret material, or, alternatively, will apply a lower classification to the document. The Department has also agreed to return the original transcripts to the committees along with a second version that includes only Secret information.

In conducting this work the Department has agreed not to share the contents of previous interview transcripts with interviewees subsequently appearing before the committee or to use these documents to prepare interviewees for their appearances. With this in mind, has the Department made any classified transcripts from previous interviews available to you in preparing for today?

Admiral Leidig. No.

OR2 [REDACTED] Thank you.

Finally, I note you are accompanied by an attorney from the Department of Defense. I would ask the DOD counsel to please state his name for the record.

Mr. Richards. Edward Richards.

OR2 [REDACTED] Thanks.

With the preliminary remarks concluded, do you have any introductory comments that you would like to make?

Admiral Leidig. No.

Mr. Richards. No.

OR2 [REDACTED] Thanks, and we appreciate very much your uniform service and for your patience and participation today.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The clock now reads 10:07, and with that I will start the first hour of questions.

EXAMINATION

BY [REDACTED] ORZ

Q Admiral, just to start out by you just state your rank and your current assignment, please.

A I am a vice admiral, retired. I am currently a Federal employee serving at the United States Naval Academy, serving as the Corbin A. McNeill Endowed Chair in Engineering.

Q Great. And if you would just briefly walk us through your education and professional background, that would be helpful for the record.

A Okay. I graduated from the Naval Academy in 1978. I was a submarine officer during the early part of my career. I commanded a nuclear-powered attack submarine, the USS Cavalla. I then had command of a squadron of submarines, an O6 command as a captain. I then came to the Joint Staff where I became a joint qualified officer. I served there from 2001 to 2003. I was Commandant at the Naval Academy, and there I was selected for flag rank.

My flag assignment was the Commander of the Naval Forces Marianas in Guam. I then was the NATO Submarine Commander and U.S. Submarine Commander in Naples. For my two-star assignment, I came back to the Joint Staff from 2009 to '10 as a two-star serving in the J-5, and then was selected to serve as the Deputy to the Commander for Military Operations in Africa Command and got my third star. And I served in Africa Command from 2010 to 2013.

Q Okay. And for your AFRICOM assignment from 2010 to 2013, you were the DCMO the entire time; is that right?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A That's correct.

Q And what was mission at AFRICOM just generally during your time there?

[REDACTED]

Q And then how did you -- what was your reporting chain? I take it it was just to the four-star commanding general; is that right?

A I reported directly to the four-star commander.

Q Okay. And with respect to Libya specifically, what was the mission during your time there at AFRICOM? I imagine it changed somewhat over the course of your time.

A Early in 2011, U.S. Africa Command led the combat operations in Libya under the U.N. Security Council resolution to defend the people in Benghazi. And so U.S. Africa Command led those operations for nearly 2 months, and then we transitioned that over to NATO, where we continued to provide support to NATO while they completed the operations.

Once those military operations were complete in Libya, and our government made a decision to reestablish the embassy in Tripoli, we then provided some military members to provide the initial security for the embassy because they were unable to contract locals as they were first standing up the embassy to provide security as they would normally do.

Q Was there a particular reason do you recall they were unable to contract locals? The chaos --

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Yes, Libya and Tripoli in particular were still kind of in turmoil, and so they wanted to get the embassy stood up, and so DOD was asked to provide military members to provide security for the embassy.

Q And with respect to, just briefly, Odyssey Dawn, which was the AFRICOM-led component of the intervention in Libya --

A That's correct.

Q -- what was your role precisely during that time period?

A I served as the Deputy Commander for General Ham, who was the Commander at the time, so I was actively involved in the planning of the military operations and in the execution of the military operations.

Q As then as it transitioned to Unified Protector, did sort of AFRICOM stepped back a little bit then, and it transferred to NATO Command? Is that basically the way it worked?

A It does. The lead for the operations transferred to the NATO Command, but as you are probably all aware, NATO lacks a lot of capabilities, and so we were directed to continue to support them with unique U.S. capabilities, which would include things like tankers, intelligence, UAVs and others to support their operations.

Q Okay. And have you ever been to Libya before?

A I have not been to Libya.

Q Okay. Thanks.

I will just talk briefly about some of the DOD programs, the personnel that were involved in Libya prior to the attack of 11 September, 2012. What was your understanding of the role and the mission of the SST team that was in Libya before August of 2012?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Sir?

Q Before August of '12. In other words, their mission as a Chief of Mission entity as SST ended on 4 August, 2012?

A So they were initially assigned there after the stand-up of the embassy to provide security. But that mission transitioned, to my recollection, in early August of '12, where they were no longer under Chief of Mission authority, but came back to DOD and then under the authority of my boss General Ham.

Q And at any time during your time there, were you aware of any plans or discussions concerning sending a permanent contingent of SST personnel to support U.S. operations in Benghazi specifically?

A No.

Q Okay. What was your level of awareness of the U.S. presence in Benghazi prior to the attack, as Deputy Commander?

A Which U.S. presence are you referring to?

Q Well, I will break it down. So were you aware that there was a State Department presence, a Temporary Mission Facility?

A No, I was not.

Q Prior to the attack you weren't?

A I was not prior to the attack.

Q And I take it you were not -- were you also not aware that there was an Annex --

A No, I was not.

Q Were you aware there was an Annex facility separate from the State Department facility that was in Benghazi prior to the attack?

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q That is correct.

A I was not aware that that was there.

Q Okay. So when did you become aware of both those facilities? Was it the night of the attack?

A The night of the attack.

Q Okay. And what -- to your knowledge what security force assistance programs were operative in Libya prior to the attack, either operative or being considered, security forces? I'm talking about the 1208 program, 1206, 1207, those types of programs where we partner with host nation forces to assist them with our security concerns. What was your level of awareness of those?

A We were planning a number of interactions with the Libyan Government and the Libyan military. We had had discussions about what military capabilities they wanted and what purchases they may want to make. We always considered that they had plenty of money to buy what they needed.

We also looked at providing U.S. military trainers to train forces there, but we had not put any specific plans in place, nor were executing any, but were just in the beginning discussion phases with our embassy, and then our embassy had lead with the Libyan Government.

Q Sure.

Prior the end of SST as Chief of Mission entity, were you aware of any assessment activities, sort of pre-1208-type activities that SST members may have been involved in in assessing Libyan partner forces?

A The SST was also doing assessments as they interacted with members of the Libyan military.

Q Okay. That would be prior to the attack.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Yes, they were.

Q Again with respect to the SST as a Chief of Mission entity, what was your understanding of the time of why that mission was not extended past 3 August of 2012?

A My understanding was is that the situation had improved in Libya, and the Ambassador was comfortable with getting security from local Libyan sources, and he no longer needed the SST.

Q So to your knowledge whose decision was it to not request from DOD an extension of that SST mission?

A Could you repeat the question?

Q Sure. What was your knowledge of whose decision it was, what individual or entity's decision it was, not to request from DOD an extension of the SST mission past 3 August, 2012?

A It was a joint Department of State and Department of Defense discussion that had occurred back in Washington, D.C., and the decision was agreed to between State and OSD that they were no longer required, and DOD would terminate the SST mission under Chief of Mission authority, and security would transition over to State Department.

Q So our understanding is there were some discussions between Ambassador Stevens and General Ham and others at AFRICOM about the role of military personnel assigned to Libya in a post-SST environment, if you will. What was your level of awareness of those discussions?

A I'm aware of one conversation. Ambassador Stevens visited U.S. Africa Command during August. I don't remember the exact date; it was a few weeks before September 11th. And I was in the meeting with him and General Ham,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and the discussion was simply the Ambassador was going to hire his own security. SST had already -- the mission had been terminated.

The SST had remained behind because we were beginning to do assessments and trying to build some partnerships with the Libyan military in order to begin some training programs, or at least to plan those. But the Ambassador told General Ham that it didn't look like, based on the current situation, we would be making any progress anytime soon with the Libyans because their government was in turmoil, there was very few people that he could actually talk to and have a conversation about that. So the Ambassador told General Ham he thought it was best if they went back to Stuttgart, reset, and then when the timing was right, he would ask them to come back. And so we agreed to that plan.

Q So our understanding is that subsequent to those discussions, there was a drawdown of the number of DOD personnel in country. Is that your recollection?

A Right. Yes.

Q We also understand that the Ambassador had some concerns about the loss of diplomatic -- what are known as privileges and immunities for the personnel, the DOD personnel, who had been part of SST, which occurred as of 4 August when the team reverted to COCOM authority. Were you aware of those specific concerns?

A Yes.

Q Could you just share with us what your recollection of those were, the concerns?

A That's always a concern, but the normal way we handle those concerns is through the Status of Forces Agreements in most countries. But many countries

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

in our area do not have SOFAs with the governments, and we have military forces there, and so we take adequate precautions when they are not protected by a SOFA. That would be the case in Libya. So anybody who would be in country would understand that there was no SOFA, and they would conduct their operations or their tasks understanding that. And the embassy understood that also. So that was a known risk.

Q Was there any kind of -- obviously once the SST personnel, their mission ended and it reverted to COCOM, I take it AFRICOM sort of owns them again or is responsible for them; is that a fair way to describe --

A They then returned to the Department of Defense chain of command, and their chain of command then has them reporting to -- ultimately to General Ham.

Q Okay. And were there any steps that AFRICOM had to take then with the loss of P&Is and a lack of SOFA? Were there any sort of legal steps that AFRICOM had to take with respect to sort of acknowledging that there was no SOFA, that, you know, any DOD personnel operating in the country are operating without a SOFA agreement?

A I don't know what the acronym "P&I" is.

Q Privileges and immunity. Sorry. The issue that we talked about where there is no Status of Forces, and there is no technical legal status under Chief of Mission. Was there any steps that AFRICOM had to take?

A Yeah. The first step is normally in a country without a SOFA is to try to have an exchange of diplomatic notes between the embassy and the country to reach some sort of agreement on how issues with military personnel would be addressed, and the embassy was working on that. But at the time when we first made the transition, we had neither.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q We understand that on or about 6 August of 2012, there was a shooting incident involving two U.S. military personnel at a checkpoint in Tripoli. Do you recall that?

A Yes.

Q And did that feed into the discussion that was ongoing that we were talking about, about the legal status of the DOD personnel post-SST?

A Yes.

Q Did that have an effect on the discussions at all?

A Yeah. We had a serious discussion about the activities that they would conduct, and after that we decided that we would limit their activity until we had a better assessment of what the security situation was in Tripoli.

Q Did you view that as a prudent precaution, given the circumstances, or would you have preferred to --

A Yes.

Q -- keep that number of personnel at 16 or something like that? I mean, what was your thought, I guess, at the time about the environment?

A I don't recall ever having any thoughts about how that affected the numbers there. Again, the Ambassador made it clear that now that they weren't under Chief of Mission authority, the people that were there weren't providing any useful work, particularly since they couldn't really have any interaction with the Libyan military because the government was in turmoil. So it was the Ambassador who recommended that they leave and go to Stuttgart. We offered to keep -- General Ham had offered to continue to have them provide security if required, and the Ambassador declined.

Q Our understanding, though, is that the embassy did retain some DOD

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

personnel in country, but it was a smaller number?

A It was a much smaller number. I don't recall the exact number.

OR2 [REDACTED] Sure.

ARI BY [REDACTED]

Q Do you remember, regardless of what the small number was, who made the determination to go to that precise smaller number?

A No, I don't know who made the decision on the exact number. It was just a general conversation that I was involved with with the Ambassador that we would take some number and have them come back to Stuttgart. But I don't recall the discussion that I was -- with General Ham and the Ambassador that involved the specific numbers.

Q How about the capabilities that the smaller number would provide, regardless of what that number was?

A The ones that would remain behind were there to continue to do assessments and be ready to do planning for future training opportunities with the Libyans. There was no discussion that they would be providing any other mission capabilities than that.

ARI [REDACTED] Thank you.

AR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q And in the conversation you mentioned between Ambassador Stevens and General Ham, do you remember what General Ham's reaction to this conversation was, whether he had any misgivings about the reduction, or whether he made any recommendations to Ambassador Stevens about the continued presence of the SST in Libya?

A I don't recall him having any misgivings. We agreed with the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ambassador's assessment that they weren't really able to achieve anything at this point. And again, their mission was to work towards setting up a training program with the Libyans, and we weren't making very much progress. Some of them had been down there for quite a while, so we thought it made sense to have them come back to Stuttgart and reset, and then we would have them go back down whenever the Ambassador is ready for them to come back.

ORZ BY [REDACTED]

Q Okay, that is helpful. Thank you.

You have already talked about lack of awareness of the U.S. presence in Benghazi. With respect to the U.S. presence in Tripoli, were you aware of any concerns about the safety or security of the embassy in Tripoli prior to the attack?

A Yes.

Q Could you just elaborate on those?

A Tripoli was a very unstable environment. There were more than 30 militias that were fighting over turf in Tripoli, and that tended to cause activities that could threaten the security of the embassy. So there was just a very unstable environment with lots of militias and, to be honest, just lots of young men with guns. And so, yeah, it created an unstable environment.

Q I take it that was presumably part of the discussion, that security reality, in this discussion that was taking place in August about whether to retain DOD personnel at the embassy even for some security function. Is that your recollection?

A Well, that was part of the discussion. And the reason that the Ambassador, at least in a sense, thought that they would now be able to contract local security forces at the embassy, where earlier on, when we provided the capability earlier on, there was none available, he had established enough

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

relationships and, I think, understood the militias and the government well enough that he felt comfortable with local Libyan security in Tripoli.

Q Okay. When did you learn that Ambassador Stevens had planned to travel to Benghazi?

A The night of the attack, when I received the initial report at my quarters that night that there had been -- I remember it exactly. I got a report at 2215. I tell people I saw the same Indiglo watch, and I was asleep in my bed. I went to bed, got up early, and it was my routine. So at 2215 I rolled over and got a report that there had been protesters, and they had overrun the facility in Benghazi, but that the Ambassador was in a safe room and was safe. And that was the initial report I got at 2215.

Q Okay. And we will talk about the chronology.

A But that was the first time I knew that he was there.

Q Given the sort of lack of awareness of a U.S. presence in Benghazi, were you surprised that you were kind of woken up in the night, and you said, well, the Ambassador is in Benghazi? I mean, did you say kind of say, well, what the heck is he doing in Benghazi?

A I think that is -- yes. The answer to that is yes, what is the Ambassador doing in Benghazi? So, yes.

So I got out of bed and went down to my basement. I have a secure video teleconferencing and computers. And I went down to the basement, and I called the command center, and I started asking those basic questions, what is the Ambassador doing there? And I started to ask questions about the situation.

AR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q How was the incident characterized to you at that time? Was it an

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

attack? Was it a protest?

A The initial report was that there were protesters at the Ambassador's residence where he was staying in Benghazi, and that the protesters had overrun the facility he was in, and that he had went to a safe room with one other gentleman, and that they were fine in the safe room.

Q And who did you receive that reporting from?

A From my command center.

OR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q Just to be clear, and I hate to belabor the point, but it is somewhat a matter of interest, your recollection was at the time, not ex post, but at the time when you got the initial report, it started with a protest, not at attack; is that your --

A That is correct.

Q Okay. Thank you. That is helpful.

If we can just step back, we have gotten ahead of ourselves a little bit. Prior to the attack, immediately prior to the attack, say the day or so before, were you involved in any discussions with the military or the State Department about the security situation in the region or security planning in the region, particularly in the run-up to the September 11 anniversary?

A Yes. And so we did prudent planning. Based on General Ham's guidance we actually did -- we had been -- the military always does planning for September 11th. We always know that there's a potential for, you know, some sort of terrorist activity on September 11th since it's the anniversary. General Ham had actually directed in the days running up to it that we do what we call a deep dive or a deep look at the intelligence to see if there was anything to indicate that there might be anything in our AOR. And we found nothing in any intelligence that would

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

indicate that there was an attack or an incident being planned by terrorists in our AOR.

Q Sure. And you mentioned that the military always does that prudent planning for the 9/11 anniversary. Do you recall specifically with respect to this 9/11 anniversary, was this discussed at all with your colleagues, State Department colleagues, at AFRICOM, or do you know --

A I didn't have any conversations with the State Department personnel at AFRICOM. They're integrated throughout the command, and so our folks that do planning would probably talk to them. But I didn't have any conversations State Department.

Q About the security, or at all?

A Again, I wasn't aware there was a facility in Benghazi, so I didn't have any conversations about the security at the facility.

Q Oh, sure. Yeah. I mean, presumably they would be concerned about Tripoli as well. I mean, as you've said, the security situation there was tenuous?

A Right. Yeah, I was pretty familiar with the security situation in Tripoli.

Q Yeah. Okay.

And I think you mentioned it. Just for the record on the day of the attack, September 11th, you were aware -- you were not aware of any specific or general threats to U.S. interests then in the region?

A I was not.

Q Okay. And I know it's outside your AOR, but were you aware of any potential unrest in Cairo? Obviously there is some incident that took place --

A I was not in advance. I know there was the incidents that occurred on September 11 in Cairo, but I wasn't aware in advance.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Okay. So could you just walk us through your perspective of the night of the attack. You've already mentioned that you were at home, and at 2215 you got a call. Maybe walk us through from there what steps you took next.

A Right. If I could just back up, there were a series of incidents that occurred in Cairo, and we tracked those closely during the day. And we were concerned that the protests in Cairo --

AR1 [REDACTED] Can we go off the record?

[Discussion off the record.]

OR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q It is 11:47. So we are back on the record. We just for the record had an unscheduled fire drill, so we had a brief hiatus.

And I think before we continue with where we left off, Admiral, you wanted to just clarify something you said earlier. Go ahead.

A Thank you. I had mentioned earlier the U.N. Security Council resolution in relation to Operation Odyssey Dawn, and I referred to it as for the protection of the people of Benghazi, but it was actually for the protection of all the Libyan people. It just so happened the military operations were initially focused on defending the people of Benghazi.

Q Thanks for that.

And then if I'm not mistaken, we left off -- you were just starting to walk us through you got the call at 2215 at home the night of the attack, and then you were just walking us through what your next course of action was. So if you could pick up there, that would be great.

A Okay. Thanks.

I think what I mentioned is we had been observing the events on that day in

[REDACTED]

Cairo and the protests, and we were concerned that those protests would cause other protests throughout the region, and particularly in North Africa. Even though Egypt is not in our area of responsibility, it surely has an affinity with the other countries that are in Northern Africa. So we were watching that carefully.

So I actually recall staying at work until almost 1900 because we wanted to see if any riots or protests would break out, and they didn't. So I then went home, and my routine is to go to bed about 2030 because I get up at 4 o'clock every morning. And I was asleep at 2215, as I mentioned, when I got a phone call, and it was my watch officer in the AFRICOM command center informing me that there had been protests that appeared to have got out of control, and that the Ambassador was in Benghazi, but that he was in a safe room at the residence where he was staying, and he and another person identified as a communicator were safe, and they would give me a follow-up report when they had more information.

Q So then what did you do then? I mean, did you go into the office or --

A Yes. I got out of bed, and I went down to my basement where I have secure communications and went to -- my intent was to go look at email and look at the Internet and see if there was any other reporting that was going on. When I was there, I noticed that my operations officer, RJ-3, was also up on his Internet. I saw him send an email. So I was able to call over to his quarters, and I asked him what he knew. He didn't have any information more than what I had. But I told him that I was a little bit concerned based on what had happened earlier in the day, and that I was going to recall my personal staff and go into the office where I had better coms and I could be in touch with D.C. and some others.

So I called the command center back. I directed them to call my staff, my XO, my aide, my communicator, and have them brought in to work. And then at that

[REDACTED]

point when I called back to the command center, I got the report that they didn't have communications with the Ambassador any longer. So then I knew that, you know, we would be involved at some point.

So I went into work. I don't know exactly what time I got there; I would guess it was closer to probably 2300. The command center, I live on the same base, and so I walked to work and went to my office initially, made some calls to try to get additional information. At that point the status was that the Ambassador was unlocated, as was the communicator that was with him, and that other people had left the place where the Ambassador was.

At that point it was being referred to as a consulate when I got the initial reports. I know later that people chose not to call it a consulate, but that's how I was being told it was that night.

So the Ambassador was unaccounted for, as was the other gentleman, but other people had been moved to another facility. I didn't know where, I didn't know by who.

At that point I directed that our command center that has a classified portion to it in those days -- it is organized a little differently now -- but we stood up the classified command center, and I said I would be down in the command center, and then I directed a complete staff recall for the command. So now all my senior officers and staff would be coming in.

I went to the command center. And initially when I got there, one of the first things we did was we had a UAV that had been flying in North Africa, and we directed it towards Benghazi so that we could see if we could get any information. And my recollection was really the only thing we saw with the Predator that night, to be honest, was we could see that the facility where the Ambassador was initially was on

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

fire. For the rest of the evening, we moved it to other locations, but we never saw anything of interest. Later, upon analysis, I think they saw the attack that occurred at the other facility, brief flashes of light, but in real time you couldn't see anything from the Predator.

When I got to the command center, the focus was on where is the Ambassador and trying to locate him. At that point I didn't know where the location that folks had went to. I didn't know who they were. I would later learn over the intervening hours that that was some folks from [REDACTED] who had come to move State Department personnel to the other facility. Again, it was several hours before I knew what the facility was, or the location, or where they were at. I just knew that they had moved to another location, and the reports we were getting from -- most of our reporting at that point were coming through the defense attaché, our defense attaché in Tripoli -- was that they were safe, and they were fine, and that they were at this other facility. Our focus was trying to help gather information to see if we could locate where the Ambassador was.

So we started to receive reports, and I don't recall exactly where, but there were some reports that there was a Caucasian, possibly an American, at one of the hospitals, and so we started trying to -- you know, we start now tapping into the Intelligence Community. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The next big event for me was that there were two Special Forces in Tripoli who informed my command center through -- we have a task force liaison officer on our staff, and I still recall he was sitting over at the table, and he said the two task force guys in Tripoli have their personal weapons. They've been authorized by the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

embassy to get on a plane and fly to Benghazi. And my understanding was their intent was to come there to link up what I then learned were [REDACTED] at the Annex -- to link up with [REDACTED] at the Annex, and their focus was to go try to find the Ambassador. And so their intent was to get on a plane, fly to Benghazi, get there, and then the plan was they were going to go to the hospital and see if they could find the Ambassador.

They contracted their own air. Again, my recollection was is they used funding that they had available, and they contracted a local aircraft company, and they flew there. The next thing -- and that took about -- as I recall, it was almost 2 hours. So now we're starting to move to the part of night, I'm thinking we're like at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning local time.

Q Sure. And actually if I could just stop you real quick, I just wanted to loop back before you get too far forward. You mentioned when you first got into the office, you made some initial calls when you heard then that the Ambassador was not accounted for. I'm curious, who were you talking to? Was it the DAT, or was it military chain of command?

A No. My communications at that point were back to the National Military Command Center and the Joint Staff. So I'm making sure that those that are senior to me know that, you know, we're standing up our command center, that we have this concern about the Ambassador is missing; there has been this event at his residence, and we are working with State Department. And our focus at that point was to try to find the Ambassador. We still thought he was alive and that there might be a potential we could, you know, find him and save him.

Q Sure. Sorry to interrupt you. You said it is about 200 or so.

A So I really think -- oh, and one other event happened during that time. It was the first time that I started to question what had happened at the residence,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

because there were some -- I had a gentleman who sat right behind me. His job is to monitor social media during an incident or event, and he was reporting that Ansar Al-Sharia was tweeting or blogging that they had some responsibility for the attack, and that was the first time -- you know, for me, it was kind of a seminal moment. It was like, hmm, that is different than what I understood had happened, more than a protest gone bad, that there are some guys related to Al Qaeda -- we consider them an Al Qaeda affiliate -- that they were somehow related to this. They were at least -- but we didn't have any other information other than that.

When the two task force men fly from Tripoli to Benghazi, they get to the airport, and we get -- this is now the first time that I can get some reports from people on the ground. All my reports up to this point have been through State Department primarily. They had their own people on the ground. I wasn't getting any reports from [REDACTED]. I have an [REDACTED] liaison officer, but he wasn't in contact with anybody.

ARI BY [REDACTED]

Q How about the DAT? I thought you said the DAT was giving you information.

A Yeah, the DAT, but he's not in Benghazi is what I mean. I don't have anybody in Benghazi giving me firsthand reports. Everything is second- or thirdhand getting to me.

DR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q Just so we understand, what we want to do -- part of what we're trying to do is to establish kind of when decisions were made on the ground, what information was available at the time vice ex post facto, what turned out to be the case historically, so we can understand. You mentioned you were getting some State Department information. How would you get that sort of flow in?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A We were talking to the DAT, who was -- but it wasn't a continuous line. He was calling when he had information, and he would call in our command center. He knew our organization well. We had worked with him for the last year.

Later in the evening, I don't think -- or at that point we did have a direct line open to the embassy. I wasn't talking to them, my J-5 was, and all I recall is he was talking to a lady at the embassy. But we didn't get very -- we got very little to no information from that line of communication. The primary information came from our DAT.

Q Okay. Got it.

A Out of Tripoli.

Q So in other words, when you say State Department information, you mean from the embassy on the ground in Tripoli?

A That's right.

Q Got it.

A I did not have any direct communications with State Department. I was working back through the National Military Command Center and the Joint Staff. That was my primary line.

Q Sure.

A So when the two Special Forces arrived from Tripoli in Benghazi, their intent was to try to get a vehicle and then go see if they could go to this hospital to see if that's where the Ambassador was, and they got stuck at the airport. I don't remember all the details except they just couldn't get whoever the local militia or whatever was to let them go. So they were held up there for a while.

Then the next moment I sort of remember is then there started to be some press reports about the Ambassador, and that perhaps that the Ambassador, again,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

might be somewhere in Benghazi. But we didn't have any way to get there. But that was our focus was to figure that out.

We did know that there was possibly some wounded, and for the first time we started to look into medevacking people, and we started to focus on what could we fly into the Benghazi airfield to help out. Could we get some Special Forces on airplanes there? Could we get some aircraft to lift people out?

So now we were focused on the Benghazi airfield. Our guys were stuck there. We thought maybe we could bring some other folks there, and we started to look at opportunities. And that's when we started to look at things like the Commander's In-Extremis Force that belonged to EUCOM. And I talked directly to the Deputy Commander at EUCOM, my counterpart, and we started talking about the CIF, and I learned there that the CIF was in Croatia, but it was on an exercise, it was not collocated with their aircraft, and it was the middle of the night.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

RPTS BLAZEJEWSKI

DCMN SECKMAN

[12:00 p.m.]

Admiral Leidig. And so I asked, could we get the CIF alerted and be ready to move.

The other thing is we started to look at other air options throughout the AOR, but the posture in Europe that night -- well, let me start with the posture in Africa is we have some aircraft in Djibouti, but none of those have the ability to reach all the way to Benghazi from there, and so they weren't a viable option. And we looked in Europe to see what aircraft were available, whether it's lift, medevac, fighters, tankers, and others. But there's none on alert, and it's the middle of the night, so our posture didn't give us the ability to be able to really respond.

I looked at smaller aircraft, including civilian aircraft that we have under contract to fly people to the continent for missions and stuff, but none of those crews were available, either, but we started alerting people for the need for aircraft, particularly for larger lift aircraft and others.

When I got a brief report and examined the availability of fighters, it was completely infeasible to have fighters available that night. There were no crews. There was no weapons. There was no pre-brief. They were on, the ones in Aviano are on an Italian airfield, and maybe you've heard all this before, and they can't get to Benghazi and back. They don't have enough gas to get there, so then you have to have tankers. The tankers are all in Europe or in northern -- or in England or Northern Europe. Same thing, you have to call crews in, get them briefed, get them up, flight time, get them down there.

Reconstruction that I recall after the event was that it would have taken at least

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

24 hours to get a fighter over to Benghazi, but we were looking into it, but there was no way we were going to get any aircraft there that night. So we were relying on the UAV; I believe it was a Predator that was up and overhead looking, but again, we weren't getting much information.

So we continued. We started to get thoughts and ideas that the Ambassador had gotten out of the facility, was somehow in a hospital downtown. The folks were at the other facility; the people on the ground weren't asking for any military assistance. What they were asking for was to get out of Benghazi, and so they were having a conversation with the folks at the Benghazi airfield, my recollection, about how we can get out of this other location that they're at, now referred to as the Annex, and get to Benghazi airfield. So I was trying to get aircraft to Benghazi so I could get them out of there as quickly as I could.

Then, really, the next major event is the attack on the Annex, and at that point, the two Special Forces guys that had been to Benghazi airfield had made it to the Annex. They had never got, as far as I know, a chance to go downtown anywhere to look for the Ambassador, but they were now at the facility, and I started to get through my task force liaison a direct report through chat that they were taking indirect fire. It wasn't described what we know now as mortars; it was just described as indirect fire, along with some small arms fire. And they asked for whatever assistance we could provide. And so, again, we started to look at immediately what aircraft might be available, going sort of through the same discussion we had earlier. Really, there was nothing had changed, even though some of the forces had started to bring people in, but they weren't in any higher readiness in the intervening 1 or 2 hours where they could have got there.

But as quickly as the attack started, it was over, and I remember we were

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

trying to ask ourselves what just happened in the attack, why was it over so quickly, and what changed? At the time, we were postulating that it was about the time the sun was coming up. They were firing from the dark. They didn't want to be exposed. There's a whole variety of reasons. We were trying to figure out why the attack was over, but we did get a report, and again, it wasn't clear that it was mortar fire. It was just indirect fire. It could have been RPGs. It could have been -- some had postulated like surface-to-air weapon in the back of a pickup flying directly in. Nobody knew exactly because it was dark. But we did know now that there were casualties. The request from the folks on the ground was to provide medevac to get the people out because the attack was over, the sun was coming up. They had now partnered with a local militia, so you now have [REDACTED] Special Forces, and a local militia, and they felt secure in the position that they were in, and they just were getting ready to load up in trucks, drive to Benghazi airfield, and they wanted us to try to get lift there. Again, lift from Europe, no matter what you have, it's several hours away. It's 4 or 5 hours for a C-130 or C-17, maybe just a tad faster. But coordinating or then discussing with the Embassy, the Libyans then provided -- and we have one small aircraft there that they had flown out. I think it was called a King Air, and then, but the Libyans provided, to my recollection, a C-130, and so then we were able to get everybody out to the Benghazi airfield, get them on the C-130, and then fly them back to Tripoli.

My attention then -- and by that time we had found the Ambassador, we had two deaths, two casualties, if I remember; no, four casualties total, the Ambassador and his communicator, the two who died on the roof, and then some injuries. Our goal was to get them over to Tripoli, and then we would meet up with C-17 medevacs was the plan and then get them out of one of the two Tripoli airports. So then we

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

shifted our focus to the medevac and the evacuation to Tripoli when they had got the aircraft to get themselves out of Benghazi.

ORZ BY [REDACTED]

Q That's very helpful. I just have a few, I guess, follow-up questions. I wanted to step back because I just wanted to let you move through the narrative without interrupting you too much.

A Okay.

Q Just a few questions about that. One, we have heard when you went into Kelley Barracks at the beginning of the event, there was something called an FPOC set up, I forget what that stands for.

A Yeah, that's our classified command center.

Q Okay.

A So we have one command center that can handle unclassified and up to secret, and then we had a smaller one where we could bring a smaller part of the staff, the FPOC, Focal Point Operations Center, where we could bring people with the right clearance in because we knew that this would involve intelligence and potentially forces that would take it up to the top secret level.

Q This would be sort of a standard for a crisis situation where you would have a classified component, too, is that a fair description of it?

A Yes, uh-huh.

Q And then you mentioned --

A This was a command center that we had exercised, I am sorry, during Operation Odyssey Dawn, and so that was our standard operating. If it was unclassified or just up to a secret level, we could run it out of our normal command center, which was in a different building. If it expected to go up to a higher

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

classification, we would bring the senior leadership to this Focal Point Operations Center.

Q You mentioned Ansar Al-Sharia in connection to Al Qaeda and so forth. Was this an organization that you all had been tracking at AFRICOM, been aware of as you sort of monitored what was going on on the ground in Libya leading up to this? In other words, you were familiar with this organization?

A Yes, I was familiar with this organization. There were -- what had happened during the war in Libya is as the rebels started to gain momentum against the Gadhafi regime, there were many Libyans that were fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iraq, and they saw an opportunity to come back. Gadhafi had actually done a pretty good job of getting rid of the terrorists there, but Benghazi-Derna area had always been a hotbed back in the 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, of providing fighters through Syria into Iraq. Many of the fighters started to come back and actually fought during the revolution against Gadhafi. So we started to be able to track some of those, and we knew that they were back in the Derna-Benghazi area, and that they had started to integrate themselves with local militias. Militias are normally ethnically oriented, tribal oriented, and many of these guys depending on their ethnicity and tribe, they sort of got themselves embedded in militias. So now you have lots of militias that are heavily armed as a result of all the armories opened up during the war. Many of the Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda-like organizations, because they helped fight with the revolution, they were treated like friends, and so they were welcomed back with welcome arms. And we knew they had infiltrated many of those organizations in the Derna-Benghazi area, so it was not surprising to hear that Ansar Al-Sharia said they were involved in the event that night.

Q You mentioned the integration into existing militias. I think one of the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

things that we have seen in the course of this investigation is the reliance of State Department, for example, on some of these militias for security on the ground. Was this something that you had been aware of, this concern that you have these militias and now you have Al Qaeda-like elements sort of integrating into this? Was this something you had been aware of or concerned about prior to the attack?

A Well, we were surely aware that they were integrating themselves and were part of the militias. Like I said, I wasn't aware there was a State Department facility there, and I wasn't aware the Ambassador was going there, and so, prior to this event, I had no knowledge of any security arrangements that he had made.

Q Okay. And I just wanted to ask you also about the -- actually, I'll come back to that. One thing I wanted to ask you about, I was going to ask you about EUCOM GIF, but we will talk about that in a minute. But with respect to, you said you had heard from a liaison officer about indirect fire at the Annex at the time of the mortar attack about 0515. I was just curious, had you received any reports about fire at that location prior to the 0515 attack? The reason I ask, we know now after the fact that there had been fire at that facility about from the time they had evacuated the State Department facility up to a certain point, and so we're just wondering if you were aware of that prior to the mortar attack at 0515?

A The only thing I was aware of is that there was some small arms fire just prior to the mortar attack, and that may have been because I don't know the exact timing of when our two task force personnel got there, but that was the time I started to receive some information. I knew there was some intermittent small arms fire, but --

Q But immediately prior to the attack, not hours before?

A I wasn't aware of any hours before. Only just kind of immediately prior

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

to the attack. Again, I was just getting chat, no voice communication. I had a task force liaison in my command center was monitoring a laptop and looking at the chat room.

Q Okay. So I think I'm going to move forward now. Oh, one other question I wanted to ask you. Given the State Department equities involved with the State Department facility and, obviously, the Ambassador and so forth, our understanding is that there is a Deputy Commander for Civil Military Affairs integrated into the AFRICOM Command structure.

A Uh-huh.

Q I think at the time it was a gentleman named Tony Holmes. I am just curious, given the State Department equities, did you consult with Ambassador Holmes at all that night during the attack?

A He didn't come in that night.

Q He didn't, okay. Any other State Department personnel, like the political adviser?

A Our POLAD, our political adviser --

Q It's okay if you don't remember the name.

A Yeah. He was there.

Q Okay. Given the equities of State, did you have any conversations with that individual during the incident?

A I talked to him throughout the evening, but I don't recall having any conversations of substance. The most -- again, I was dealing with it in real time, so most of the information that was coming out of State Department came through the Embassy and our DAT. I think, from my perspective, that was the only reliable information I was getting that night from State.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Okay, that's helpful.

AR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q I've got one. As you were considering the military response options during the time period, did you have any conversations with Admiral Losey directly or with anyone else at SOC Africa?

A I spoke with Admiral Losey a few times directly that night on the phone, particularly when we were trying to see what capabilities we might bring to be able to help the folks at the Annex. I had roughly, I would say, three conversations with him about military options.

Q Do you remember what you discussed with him?

A Primarily the discussion was going through a whole variety of options, and what was the feasibility and practicality of putting any of those options into place, but then also I was getting advice from Admiral Losey on what the capabilities of the task force personnel were there, and from his perspective, based on the reports he was getting, he thought that they were capable of handling the situation that they had at the Annex, but all the options that we looked at and options, again, because of what the posture was in Europe that night, none of those options came to bear, either trying to move military personnel there, move military aircraft to Benghazi.

AR2 [REDACTED] Thank you.

OR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q And just to be clear, with respect to the attempts that you were engaged in to actively secure assistance of some kind from military coming in to Benghazi, was that generated, was that attempt sort of self-generated, or was it as a result also of direct requests from the Embassy through the DAT or somebody else? In other words, were they asking for help, to your recollection?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A I don't recall getting any requests from the Embassy for military assistance, except for medevac or lift, during the entire event.

Q Okay.

A The only requests I had for military assistance was during the indirect fire from the task force personnel, and then once that indirect attack was over, they said we're going to get out of this Annex, we're going to get to the Benghazi airfield, and now what they wanted was lift capability at Benghazi airfield to be able to get out.

Q Okay, that's helpful. So I think I'm going to move on. We're going to come back to, we talked a little bit about EUCOM CIF, but I wanted to talk about that and then several other entities that were activated that night or made aware that night, put on stand by. I think what I'll do, I don't need to enter this into the record necessarily, but I just want to put it in front of you so you can see it. So this is a timeline from DOD, from 11 September and 12 September of 2012, and I just want to ask you about where it has, and I'm going to refer you to -- this should be Stuttgart and Libya time on the right, so to the right of the slash marks. So sometime between midnight and 0200 this talks about how actions -- sorry, there were verbal orders from the Pentagon to the effective combatant commands to expedite movement of forces upon receipt of formal authorization. I'm just wondering, do you recall that? What actions were verbally conveyed to AFRICOM in order to expedite the sort of movement of forces discussed here?

A I'm still reading.

Q Sure, take your time.

A So I'm familiar with all these. This was -- I had already had conversations with EUCOM about potentially moving the CIF. Obviously, I don't have -- they weren't in my chain of command, so I couldn't direct them to move, but

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

we were already making efforts to get them linked up with their aircraft to be ready to move, and we had looked at options to move the FAST. At that point, the FAST is not collocated; at that point in time before the new normal, the aircraft weren't collocated with the FASTs.

Q In Rota?

A In Rota. So they couldn't immediately deploy. But we were looking at options to move them, but the FAST is limited in its military capabilities. It has no mobility, and so, basically, you just have a platoon of Marines that are armed with light weapons.

Q Is it fair to say that FAST's mission is to sit on real estate and hold that real estate, is that a fair description of it? You mentioned they don't really move.

A It could be. They have a whole range of missions, but they need to be augmented in many cases with lift, intelligence, and others to be able to do those missions, depending on what it is.

Q Okay.

A And then the Special Operations Force of the United States [REDACTED] and but I had a conversation with General Ham -- again, I don't know the exact time -- where he relayed to me that he had had a conversation with the Chairman and the Secretary and that what you have in here, the FAST to prepare to deploy, the EUCOM to prepare to deploy, and the Special Operations Force of the United States to prepare to deploy, he relayed that those had been approved by the Chairman and the Secretary.

Q Okay.

A And in that same conversation, I remember telling him that, you know, Roger, I've already had conversations with EUCOM, and they're getting the CIF to try

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

to get them collocated with their aircraft, we're looking to get an aircraft to link up with the FAST team, [REDACTED]

Q Okay, maybe just real quick, I think we're running a little short on time, but if I could just quickly move through each of these three, take them separately, 1, 2, 3.

A Okay, all right.

Q So, with respect to the FAST, as you were considering options, courses of action to respond to Benghazi, was there a consideration of sending the FAST platoon to Benghazi?

A No, based on -- the only time there was a request for military assistance with, you know, military capability shooters was during the very brief indirect fire attack, and that was over, and immediately after that attack, the request was for aircraft to do medevac. So considering that the FAST is not collocated with aircraft, it was not a reasonable military option to consider sending them. They could have never got -- we could have never got aircraft to Rota, got them on aircraft, and moved them there in time. The guys on the ground who understood the situation best were looking for aircraft to get out of there, not to bring more forces in.

Q Right.

A What was conveyed to me is with [REDACTED] with the Special Forces, and with whatever Libya militia that the [REDACTED] and others had worked with there, that they had the security to get themselves from the Annex to Benghazi airfield and protect themselves there, and so they weren't looking for shooters at that point.

Q Okay.

ARI BY [REDACTED]

Q So, excuse me, so this right up here on fold number one here suggests

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

that Secretary Panetta directed a -- one, two FAST platoons to prepare to deploy to Benghazi?

A No, he directed, according to this, to prepare to deploy.

Q To Benghazi?

A Yeah, be prepared to deploy to Benghazi.

Q Right, right.

A And there's two, and so we would have one prepared to go to Benghazi if needed, one to prepare to go to Tripoli, but neither have aircraft with them at that point.

Q I understand that, but then I'm not certain what you just said in answer to the previous one that they were prepared to deploy to Benghazi, but at some subsequent time, they decide to opt not to go to Benghazi?

A That's not what I said.

Q Okay.

A What this says is somewhere between 12 to 0200, the Secretary and the Chairman authorize and are prepared to deploy. I said that when the event occurred at 5:15, that we were still working to prepare deployment, 5:15, after that event was over and the personnel on the ground told me very clearly they were leaving the Annex and going to Benghazi airfield, and they had adequate security for what they needed to do to get to Benghazi and protect themselves, there was no longer a need for that. I never countermanded an order. They were still preparing to go to Benghazi because we don't know what's going to happen in Benghazi, so we still want them to be prepared, so I didn't stop them nor tell them not to, but in my own mind, they were not going to get there because there was no aircraft. These guys were going to Benghazi airfield, getting ready to get on a plane to fly to Tripoli.

[REDACTED]

OR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q I think maybe one of the questions we have or confusion about this is we look at the timeline vice what was going on on the ground. You've talked about FAST and what their limitations are. Also, I note that, I think by midnight, certainly by 0200, I mean, all of the Americans had evacuated I think by midnight from the State Department facility and were over at the Annex, so --

A That was my understanding, by midnight, that they were all over at this other facility.

Q Right. So I think one of the questions we wanted to explore was if there was a scenario in which the FAST platoon would go to Benghazi, if that were to be the case, it raises a host of other questions about how do they move from the airport, for example, to wherever they're going, where they're going, you know, if it's to an Annex operated by another agency or -- so there's a whole host of questions. I think we were just trying to understand what the thinking was at the time with potential response options, so maybe if we could -- and we're running a little short on time, I apologize, but if we could just talk a little bit about, back up to -- your testimony is that FAST, from where you were sitting, FAST platoon was never really intended to go to Benghazi, is that a fair --

A No, I don't think that's a fair characterization. They were preparing to deploy to Benghazi. That would involve doing the same thing with them, getting them alerted, getting their gear, getting them to the airstrip, and then getting aircraft there. And then there's about a 3-hour flight time from Rota.

Q To Benghazi?

A To Benghazi. So no matter what you're talking about, I'm thinking not what can they do in the next hour, I'm always thinking about what can they do 6, 7

hours from now because that's the soonest they could get there. So they're still marching off, preparing to deploy, and the intent was if things had been different on the ground, perhaps they could have deployed.

Q So, given that you're thinking, obviously, hours ahead to when they could plausibly FAST be in Benghazi, had you started the process of planning in concert perhaps with the J-3 how you would move them from Benghazi airstrip to wherever they were going, where they would be going, what their mission would be when they got there, was that something that you had started to consider when you were considering response options?

A In the broadest of terms, we would have considered having them -- what we had talked about is they would fly to Benghazi airfield and provide security there, and then if we could have mobility for them, then they would try to link up with the team that was at the Annex, but that was just the very beginning of planning.

Q Oh, yeah, and one other thing I wanted to ask you about then. Our understanding is that to send a military team like FAST into a foreign country, there would be an issue of flight clearances. Had you started the process of securing the necessary flight clearances for the FAST to go to Benghazi?

A We had conversations with the DAT and the Embassy about flight clearances because we had talked about options to bring C-130s, C-17s. We already had clearances to fly UAVs, so the avenue was open to be able to make those requests, and we talked about them. We did not, as far as I know, I wouldn't have done it, somebody on my staff would have. I don't recall making a specific request to deploy the FAST into Libya. We hadn't gotten to the point where it was an executable military option.

[REDACTED]

ORZ Mr. [REDACTED] Okay. I think we're about out of time. We'll probably come back. Let's go off the record. We'll switch now. Do you want to take a 5 minute break?

Admiral Leidig. I'm actually okay.

[Recess.]

EXAMINATION

ODI BY [REDACTED]

Q Back on the record. The time is 12:30. Admiral Leidig, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you both for your service and for speaking with us today.

ODI
My name is [REDACTED] I am with the minority staff of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and I am joined by my minority colleagues on both the Oversight and Government Reform Committee and the Armed Services Committee.

During our discussion, my colleagues and I would like to ask you a series of questions about the September 2012 attacks in Benghazi, some of which may appear basic and may revisit topics discussed during the previous hour. Our intent in asking our questions is to develop a complete and accurate record, and we can only really begin to appreciate how difficult and challenging the circumstances were for you and your colleagues on that night, so I just wanted to thank you again.

A You're welcome.

Q Admiral, you had provided a very helpful timeline for us in the discussion of your thought process and some of the events that occurred during the last hour, and before we discuss more about your decisionmaking process and how you and perhaps others arrived at certain decisions on the night of the attacks, we would like to begin with a discussion of the forces that actually were deployed on that

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

night. During a transcribed interview with the House Oversight Committee, Admiral Mike Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Vice Chair of the Accountability Review Board, stated this about the military's response on the night of the attacks.

ODI [REDACTED] And I'll enter this portion of that transcript, which is a January 19, 2013, interview, into the record, as Exhibit 1.

[Leidig Exhibit No. 1

was marked for identification.]

ODI BY [REDACTED]:

Q I would like to read a portion of this into the record as well for you, and I'll focus your attention on the middle of page 65. During this interview, Admiral Mullen stated the following, quote, "Well, I would go back to, I think, it's important in my experience with two Presidents is that when something like this happens, the Presidents say do everything you possibly can do. And that's all the guidance I need to move forces, and certainly with two Secretaries of Defense that I served with, that's all the -- all the guidance Secretary Gates and Secretary Panetta would need.

"So we're -- and in fact, in this situation, it does not seem to be, at least from a public standpoint, widely understood, we moved a lot of forces that night. They don't move instantly, but we had a significant force that was deployed doing other things, Special Operations Force in Europe and Croatia, which was redeployed to a base in Southern Europe. We had a significant force from the United States which was deployed to a base in Southern Europe. So there were a lot of forces moving, and you make those packages, if you will, as robust as possible because you don't know when it's going to end and you don't know exactly what's going to happen next, and I'm very confident that was done?"

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

"All of that while you're trying to put together the picture as rapidly as possible, moving a drone over, a UAV, unarmed UAV over Benghazi as rapidly as possible to give you, give yourself a better, give yourself better situational awareness, that was done. You're pulling every single spring you possibly can find -- can to find out what's going on, including those forces that are, and this isn't just the Pentagon, this is -- I certainly saw this in the State Department, I saw this in the intelligence community, from my review, if you will, and you're piecing all that together to try to put together a plan to take whatever the next step is going to be, and it's all happening simultaneously, and from what I could see, it certainly was that night," close quote.

Admiral, first, I would like to ask, do you agree with Admiral Mullen's assessment that significant forces were deployed on the night of the attacks?

A Well, certainly, I agree for the ones that Admiral Mullen in his statement here agree, that those absolutely were moved, that's the commander's in extremis force from Croatia was eventually moved from Croatia when it linked up with this aircraft to Sigonella. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], and as we discussed in the previous hour, we started to prepare the FAST team and others to move along with medical evacuation capability, lift capability. So there was a large amount of forces that were moving.

Q So does this fact suggest to you that the Department was responding with a multiplicity of assault forces that night or various options?

A From my perspective, being in the AFRICOM Command Center, we were given access to every capability that was available and as quickly as it could move. I never saw at any moment during the evening where whatever we needed people weren't doing their absolute best effort to get us that capability.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q And does that suggest to you that the Department was taking or took the attacks seriously?

A Absolutely.

Q Admiral Mullen's statements also seem to describe some of the uncertainty that's inherent in probably any battlefield situation. Can you just describe for us, and I think you may have touched on this in the last hour in describing some of the video that you were reviewing, just the balance between trying to ascertain and determining what's happening on the ground and what might happen next with what the appropriate response should be?

A What I think is always important to understand about the events that happened that night is that the information as it became available was imperfect, and most of it was second- and third-hand information that was being passed through informal networks, and we would receive through the defense attache was largely the information source. It wasn't until those two task force members got to Benghazi and eventually got to the Annex that we started to get some firsthand reporting.

In addition, just from my own personal timeline, I know that the reports I was receiving were generally 1 to 2 hours later than the reconstructed timeline, so when I'm awakened at my quarters at 2215, I know from the reconstructed timeline that in fact the Temporary Mission Facility there had already been overrun, and so you're dealing with time late information, imperfect information, trying to build that into a coherent picture and then make decisions, and it didn't slow down decisions. We have to make decisions with imperfect knowledge, but it was a very unclear picture through the night, and I think that people often forget is there was a big focus on where is the Ambassador, what can we do to save the Ambassador if he is still alive, and that was a big part of the focus for the first several hours.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Thank you, that's very helpful, and I think we would like to discuss that and what you perceived to be the mission in a little bit. Just to take a step back now from a discussion of some of the forces that were actually deployed on the night, we can talk a little bit about the decisionmaking process and talk about it maybe just in general terms how you arrived at some of the decisions that you made that night. Can you just explain for us how, you know, as -- well, first, let me ask this way: With General Ham out of the country, how did you view your role at AFRICOM on that night?

A I viewed myself as the, still as the deputy commander, but I made decisions as they were required to be made, and I kept General Ham informed.

Q Okay.

A And that was the command arrangement that I had with General Ham when he was out of the country, that I would never hold up a decision that needed to be made; I would make the decision and keep him informed. But there was never a time during the evening where I recall that I had either made a decision or did anything that was counter to the same way that he would have done it, and we stayed in communication throughout the night.

Q Okay, thank you. Can you just generally explain this process by which the commander, the deputy commander, such as yourself, the DCMO, how you would evaluate the options at your disposal in a contingency? Is it the case that you would generally tend -- how do you generate your list of options? Do you try to consider everything and put everything on the table and then begin to winnow your list down to the appropriate response? Can you maybe just walk us through that process?

A What I would like to say is the AFRICOM, the Africa Command staff

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

was very experienced. Don't forget, just the year before we fought in light combat operations in Libya, and so we had very good crisis planning teams. And so, generally, what would happen, I have knowledge of many of those capabilities, a lot of it very recent experience because of the combat operations in Libya. We worked very closely with European Command. So I was personally very aware of European Command's capabilities, AFRICOM's capabilities with a very robust team supporting me. So, in general, not only would I personally be considering military options that I knew that would be available, I also have a staff through my operations officer, my J-3 and my J-5 presenting me with additional options as planning teams as part of our staff put together and present options, so I think it was a combination of my personal experience plus the extensive experience of the staff in putting options together, and then looking at those options and which ones were the -- you know, passed the series of tests of feasibility, reasonability, timeliness and other, you know, kind of tests that we would put them to to see if they were military options that would be appropriate for this situation.

Q And I think you may have already said this, but I would just like to ask it in a slightly different way. On the night of September 11, in the early morning of September 12, did you in fact employ or preside over a process that considered all possible response options?

A Yes.

Q Okay. You had mentioned just a moment ago some of the reports that you were receiving and when in the course of the night you began to receive firsthand or what you described as firsthand reporting in Benghazi. I would like to focus on -- in the last hour, you had mentioned the possibility of setting up a medevac in order to remove or receive or transport the wounded in Benghazi. I would just like to

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

ask you, and this is based on some testimony that our committee has received during last year's full committee hearing on May 8th, Greg Hicks, who was the Deputy Chief of Mission at Embassy Tripoli, testified that sometime in the 2 a.m. time frame, he advised the State Department, Main State, to evacuate the personnel from Benghazi. Can I just ask generally, did you consider it a priority to get people out of harm's way on the night of the attacks?

A Absolutely. As I talked to the first hour, our initial focus after trying to resolve what had happened to the Ambassador and the other missing gentlemen was to find a way to get them out of Benghazi, and so that was a big part of our focus. It was either evac or medevac, and as we learned that there were casualties or deaths, then the mission starts to become a blended evac and medevac, so we were working ardently to get them out of Benghazi, but as I stated earlier, we then learned that the Embassy had found an option to get a Libyan C-130 to go to Benghazi, so we then focused our evac and medevac military options to look at the two airports in Tripoli, because we knew for them to get the best medical care, we had to get them out of Libya and get them back to Landstuhl, where they could get appropriate medical care. So then we shifted our focus over to the two airports in Tripoli, and we worked with the Embassy to figure out which one was the best.

Q So maybe just to kind of drill down a little bit further because I think there has been maybe possibly some confusion over the timing and what possibly could have been known at certain points in the night.

A Right.

Q Is it your belief or your statements here today that the medevac or perhaps even an evacuation, you seemed to kind of distinguish between those two, that that was always part of the response on the night of the attacks?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A That was always part of the response, from the very beginning. We knew that at some point, we were going to have to execute that mission.

Q Okay. Can you just help us explain or understand that. Is that because when you're confronted with an uncertain situation that could possibly be a hostage situation or something else, that, on the one hand, you might want to mass or surge assault forces but on the other hand, you may want to provide for, you know, lift or an evacuation capability of some sort?

A I don't think it's an either/or question. I think it could be either/or/and in the sense that you still may have to surge forces if you were doing a medevac, and so we continued to look at options to do both, but it became clearer as the events occurred real time that, like I said, by the time the indirect attack took, occurred at the Annex, that the forces on the ground were asking for evac or medevac capability. They weren't asking for more forces to come in, and based on their experience and the advice of my Special Operations commander, we thought they understood the situation best, and I believe that was the right call, and so we then focused on removing the people from Benghazi.

Q Okay.

OD2 BY [REDACTED]

Q Just to clarify further, so when you have a situation where an Embassy or Americans are in trouble and you're going to have to have a military response, and the evacuation component is a tool that's in the tool box that you -- if it's not obvious and right in front of you, it's very close to you almost at all times, is this --

A Yes.

Q Okay. And that was the case that night?

A Yes. We had a noncombatant evacuation operation plan for Tripoli

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

already in place, not Benghazi because I wasn't aware that it was a facility or that people were going to be there that night. We didn't have a specific plan for Benghazi, but it's very easy to take an existing plan and modify it for a different location. You just need a little bit different intel and information, and then you can execute a very similar plan that we had for Tripoli in Benghazi, so it would not have been hard to execute.

ODI BY [REDACTED]

Q And just to clarify, the fact that forces or that personnel that we were in this NEO, in the noncombatant evacuation, some of that information was relayed to you by the two members of the task force when they were in the airfield in Benghazi?

A I don't understand the question.

Q I think you had discussed a little bit some of the information, the reporting you were receiving from the task force members when they were, they landed in Benghazi?

A Uh-huh.

Q And that was some of your firsthand reporting of what was happening in Benghazi, and I just wanted to confirm because I thought I heard during the last hour that it was at that point that they may have relayed back some information that there were some wounded and that a medevac might be necessary?

A Well, when they first arrived at Benghazi, the initial reporting from the task force members was that they were stuck at the airfield, and their intent was to go try to find the Ambassador, so I think they got there roughly around 2:00 in the morning, if I remember the timeline correctly, and that was their focus. They were delayed significantly. When they got to the Annex, we didn't get a lot of reporting initially when they got to the Annex. It was only when we started just before the

[REDACTED]

indirect fire attack reporting of some small arms, that's the first time I remember the task force making some reporting. And then the indirect fire attack, then the attack ended very abruptly. Then the reporting from them became more regular, and their focus at that point was we have adequate forces, we have adequate security, we're with [REDACTED] and we have a militia here who is going to protect the roads and get us out to Benghazi, that's when they said very clearly, we need your assistance to get out of Benghazi airfield. We'll get to Benghazi. We don't need help with that. What we need is to be able to get out of Benghazi airfield.

Q Okay. But to be clear, there are already preparations in place to facilitate that?

A We're working on options to get aircraft there. At that point, I don't have any aircraft in the air, but I have aircraft that are now on alert in Germany, that crews are coming in and they're getting ready to lift and go wherever we would need them to go. They ultimately end up being part of the crews and others that go to Tripoli to do the medevac from there.

Q Thank you. I think you touched on this a little bit during the last hour, but if we could revisit just some of the practical limitations in the response time for the transport aircraft.

A The transport aircraft, again, there's none on alert, and so there's the time lag of in the middle of the night calling crews in, getting them briefed, having the right intel, following flight plans, all the routine flight things, and then there's just the amount of flight time that it takes to get from Germany down to Libya. Again, my recollection is a C-130 was about 5 to 6 hours and a C-17 was probably an hour or so shorter than that. So by the time you call crews in and bring them in, I think, you know, again, roughly we were still talking, you know, closer, 8 to 10 hours before you

[REDACTED]

could get an aircraft there.

Q Okay, thank you. And on this issue that was discussed during the last hour of the request for flight clearances, I think you had mentioned it would probably be some other person on your staff who may have been in contact with folks who were working that issue, but did you have any awareness over whether people in country, on the country team or within the DAT's office were, in fact, working that issue?

A Oh, and maybe I didn't say it clearly. I don't think there would have ever been a problem with any flight clearances. We already had clearance to fly the UAV there, and in every discussion we had had preliminary up to that point, the DAT, who was very well connected with the country, they would have been approved, and then through the rest of the, that day and the following day, we never had any problem with clearances, so I don't think they were ever a problem.

Q Were those transport aircraft, the C -- I forget if it's the C-130s or the C-17s, were those in any way delayed by the lack of flight clearances?

A No, they were not delayed by a lack of flight clearances.

Q We discussed a little bit in the last hour some of the other civilian personnel at AFRICOM as well as the role that some of those folks may have played on the night of the attacks. You had mentioned that there was a deputy for civil military affairs who, I believe, wasn't at AFRICOM on the night of the attacks, but there was a political attache who was and you had characterized some of your conversations with him that you didn't discuss anything of substance with him, and I just wanted to ask --

Mr. Richards. I think he said he didn't recall whether he --

ODI [REDACTED] Thank you, I appreciate that clarification.

[REDACTED]

ODI BY [REDACTED]

Q So you don't recall that you had any conversations of substance with him; is that correct?

A So, just to be specific, the Deputy Commander for Civil Military Operations was not there that night, he didn't come to the Command Center. To be honest, I don't know, recall where he was. The political, the policy adviser, the POLAD was there that night. He was very helpful during the night doing some specific coordination. I don't recall any specific conversations that I had with him, but I do remember him being very helpful.

Q Okay.

A He was brand new to the command. He probably had only been there, if I recall, maybe a month or so, but he was a very experienced State Department person and was very helpful.

Q And was he relaying or advising you at all on what your mission should be that night or providing orders or providing restrictions on how to carry out what you perceived to be the mission?

A I don't recall that he provided any of that type of advice or any restrictions or anything. He -- I don't think that would have been his role that night. We were dealing with one country in a crisis. His general purpose that night was to try to go out and find information from State Department and other sources, but, again, the Command Center, this Focal Point Operations Center probably has about 30 people in it. I'm mostly working with, you know, a cadre of about five or six senior people as I'm trying to coordinate the whole picture.

Q And just to follow up on that point, there have been some statements to this effect, and I would just like to ask for your comment on them, but on the night of

[REDACTED]

the attacks, did you or to your knowledge anyone in your command receive any order from then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to stand down?

A I never received any orders from the Secretary of State or heard of any orders from the Secretary of State.

Q While we're discussing some of the options that were considered or deployed on the night of the attacks, I did just want to follow up on one point from the last hour. We were talking about the Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team, the FAST Team, and at one point, you had mentioned that it was at a certain point in time a nonexecutable military mission, and I was wondering if you could just help clarify for us what you meant by that, and I think we were talking about whether one of the FAST Teams that may have been originally designated to go to Benghazi, you seemed to have a belief that it couldn't arrive there in time to perform any sort of meaningful mission.

A Right. So, again, I'll try to put it in my perspective. The first time that there was ever a request for any kind of military assistance, so shooters, was during the indirect attack, which is roughly, you know, 5:15, 5:30, in the morning. Although, earlier in the night, we had told the FAST to be prepared to deploy, they still didn't have aircraft collocated with them. Again, I was dealing with reality in real time. That attack was over in 15 minutes, and the request was for lift and medevac, and they no longer required any forces to Benghazi. So I considered that option not executable because there's no aircraft in Rota, there's no longer a military request from the experts on the ground for any military assistance of that type, and so that option doesn't make any sense at that point to me, but they're still continuing to prepare to deploy. Even though they were told to prepare to deploy to Benghazi, aircraft are starting to move to get ready to link up with the FAST team. At that point,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

they can deploy wherever they're needed, even though the initial order was to say be prepared to deploy to Benghazi, but they could just as easily deploy to Tripoli or, you know, as we know, a couple days later, we had problems at the Embassy in Tunis, and we considered options to move FAST Teams into Tunis.

002 BY [REDACTED]

Q And, again, those original orders to prepare the FAST Teams were based on the general information that there was something serious happening in Benghazi. Is that correct?

A That's correct.

Q And so, you know, you're preparing for a potential need for this group while simultaneously trying to assess what's taking place on the ground, correct?

A Absolutely. For military personnel, prepare to deploy orders are a very specific set of orders. That means only one thing, prepare to deploy to go to Benghazi. There still has to follow an execute order. And so we continued to do everything to prepare to deploy them to Benghazi throughout the night. We never got to the point where we could actually execute moving them to Benghazi because we had already started moving the forces out of there, and they were moving back to Tripoli, but you link that prepare order with the crisis, which doesn't stand still and keeps moving.

Q Absolutely, I understand. You want to get your team geared up and ready to go as early as possible for whatever contingency you may have on the other end of where they're going?

A That's correct. So you can see from the, you know, from the timeline, you can see what the Chairman and Secretary through my combatant commander, they were making every military option available by preparing to deploy a number of

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

force package capabilities to have them ready to execute when and if needed.

Q Got it.

ODI BY [REDACTED]:

Q You had touched on some of your discussions or conversations with National Military Command Center. Would that include General Ham at the time?

A My communications -- I did have communications with General Ham. My recollection is they weren't through the National Military Command Center. General Ham travels with a communications team that allows him to be in communications 24 hours a day, and so my communications were through his personal communicators and his executive officer, and then we would call into his comms team, and I would talk to him directly.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

RPTS JOHNSON

DCMN SECKMAN

[12:58 p.m.]

ODI

BY [REDACTED]

Q Was it your opinion that General Ham was being kept fully and timely informed of the information and reporting that you had received over the course of the night?

A Yes.

Q Did it appear to you at any point that General Ham may have also been receiving information from perhaps other sources or entities? Did you have any visibility into that?

A I only knew that he was having some direct conversations with the Chairman and Secretary. How he was getting it, any additional information other than that I was providing him, I am not aware how he was doing it that evening.

Q Okay. I would like to return to the night of the attacks, just before the attacks began. You were discussing some of the protests that you observed, I believe that day, outside Embassy Cairo.

A Uh-huh.

Q And at that time, were you aware of the motivation or the catalyst for those protests?

A Yes, I think I understood from press reporting and some -- a little bit of military reporting that it was related to the -- I forget how it's be being described now -- but a video, if I remember correctly.

Q A YouTube video?

A Yes.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Again, working backwards chronologically here, there was a discussion in the last hour about the Site Security Team. And I just kind of had one follow-up question -- or two rather -- related to that, just to kind of summarize I think where we may have even left off. Did DOD withdraw the SST against the express wish of Ambassador Stevens that it remain in Libya?

A No. I never at any point knew or heard any concerns from the Embassy or from the Ambassador. And as I said, we met with the Ambassador in August, he didn't raise any issues or concerns about having the mission transition from chief of mission authority to Department of Defense.

Q Did DOD convert the status or change the mission of the Site Security Team against the express wish of Ambassador Stevens that it remain under his authority?

A No. Again, as I said in the meeting, that when Ambassador Stevens visited the AFRICOM headquarters in August, we had a very cordial conversation. And he agreed to -- actually, at that point, the SST had already shifted to Department of Defense authority. He didn't raise any issues or concerns about that. And he in fact was the one that recommended that they redeploy to Stuttgart until they could be better utilized in the future.

002 [REDACTED] I just have one final question. Just make this Exhibit 2.

[Leidig Exhibit No. 2

was marked for identification.]

002 BY [REDACTED]

Q Sir, this exhibit is some testimony that was given before the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 7 of 2013. And it involves a discussion between a Senator and Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey. And it's involving the

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

F-16 issue, and about why F-16s from Aviano couldn't have been used. And if I can just draw your attention to page 30 at the bottom.

A All right.

Q And the question was, why couldn't these F-16s be used? And one of the answers was because, you know, it was going to take a considerable amount of time; in this case, he says, 20 hours to get them there. Do you generally agree with that assessment that it would have taken a --

A Yes.

Q Okay. And then the other answer that he provides is he says it was the wrong tool for the job. And I am just wondering if you can opine on your expertise of this platform and whether or not it was in fact the wrong tool for the job, even assuming you could have gotten them there.

A I mean, I think it's a hypothetical question from my perspective. I mean that my best answer is I was dealing with reality. They weren't available. And so that's not a tool that I have available in my tool kit. And so I wasn't able to use it in any way. I considered options for employment of F-16s, but in this case, since they weren't available, I didn't use them.

Q So you looked, they weren't available?

A I looked at -- what we specifically did is we asked what the military options are. Having fighter aircraft fly to Benghazi is an option. How would we employ them? We looked at options on how they might be employed. But then when you apply the final test is, is it an executable mission? The answer is it was not. They would not be available. For a guy dealing -- for a guy like me commanding the crisis, it doesn't -- it isn't worth my effort to spend much more time thinking about what to do with F-16s when they are not going to be available for, as

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

the Chairman said, at least 20 hours.

OD2 [REDACTED] Got it. Thank you.

OD1 BY [REDACTED]

Q Just to conclude, and I apologize for jumping around topically here, but I would like to discuss the Accountability Review Board and its investigation.

A Uh-huh.

Q You mentioned you remained at AFRICOM, I believe, until this 2013?

A I retired in early July of 2013.

Q Okay. Are you aware of whether AFRICOM, any of its staff participated in any way in responding to requests for information from the Accountability Review Board, its investigation of the facts and circumstances of the attacks in Benghazi?

A From my time at AFRICOM, we provided quite a bit of information back to the Accountability Review Board.

Q Did you ever instruct your staff to be anything other than completely forthright and cooperative with the ARB?

A No. General Ham and I were very clear that we would be fully cooperative with the ARB.

OD1 [REDACTED] Thank you. We will go off the record.

[Recess.]

ARI BY [REDACTED]

Q Admiral, I would like to begin this line of questioning, before I turn it over to my colleague, and make reference to something that we said at the beginning. We posed a series of questions to the list of the details to make sure we fully understand the granularity of the specifics. And I want to clarify that in asking

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

questions about the FAST teams dispatched to Benghazi, or potentially dispatched to Benghazi, I did not mean to suggest, imply, or infer that you had countermanded an order in any way or acted in any way inappropriately. I am merely trying to gather the specifics about that. So I want that to be reflected on the record --

A Okay.

Q -- on my behalf and on the behalf of the chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

A Thanks. I understand. Thank you.

OR2 [REDACTED] Just to note we started at, I believe, 1:14.

OR2 BY [REDACTED]

Q So I wanted, if I could, just jump back to where we left off a couple hours ago. We talked about the FAST. With respect to the EUCOM CIF, if you could just walk us through. I understand you were effectively the commander on the ground, you know, in AFRICOM. You were in communication with General Ham, but as the deputy commander. I am just trying to understand what options you were considering before utilizing the EUCOM CIF to respond to the attacks in Benghazi. What were you thinking about that at the time?

A Okay. So I knew that EUCOM had a CIF. And we actually had a sharing agreement with EUCOM between AFRICOM and EUCOM. And so my first actions were to understand where the EUCOM CIF was; I didn't know that off the top of my head when I first got to the Command Center, and what their current status was. So we at the staff level, and then I talked to the deputy commander at EUCOM directly, to find out what their status was. And I learned that they were on an exercise in Croatia. It was now in, you know, in the early hours of 12 September, so asleep, and they weren't co-located with their aircraft. And I worked hard to try to

[REDACTED]

understand how far apart they were and what that meant. But I understand well what the capabilities of the commander's in extremis force is. So unlike the FAST, this team comes with mobility, more highly-trained Special Forces-type operators, and can be inserted into a middle of a crisis situation and have much more effect. And then so surely the CIF would be a capability that, if needed, could be deployed into an uncertain situation in Benghazi. They come with their own mobility, assuming that the lift is there, with their own vehicles. And so they were a capability that could be deployed to Benghazi airfield. Then with their own vehicles, which are hardened vehicles, then be able to, if required, and if we assess it was safe enough, with some risk, to be able to maybe fight their way or into an unknown situation, make their way to the Annex or the Temporary Mission Facility to provide security or to remove people. So that was a very real mission set that they could do.

Q Okay, so in anticipation of potentially needing to do that. You obviously mentioned that it was in the early morning hours of 12 September.

A Yeah.

Q So before the mortar attack and the eventual -- which led to the eventual evacuation of all the Americans from Benghazi. Is that something that AFRICOM, you in particular, in concert with your colleagues there, started to consider or plan for what that team would do, how they would -- where they would go, what the mission would look like? Is that something that you started the planning process on?

A Absolutely. So they were alerted, they were told to go co-locate with their aircraft. You can see that that was one of the options that the Secretary and Chairman gave us permission to tell them to deploy. And General Ham told me that we had permission to move them to Sigonella. So they were immediately directed to muster, get their gear, get with their aircraft, fly to Sigonella, which has an air strip and

[REDACTED]

a hangar, some capabilities, and be ready to deploy from Sigonella to wherever directed.

Q Okay.

A So what we envisioned was the situation that was unknown with some risk in Benghazi. And the idea would be that they would fly into the -- only really the only airfield there, the Benghazi airfield, and then they would self-deploy to wherever they were needed in Benghazi.

Q Okay. And you mentioned that it was a EUCOM asset, the GIF.

A Uh-huh.

Q Was that asset transferred over to AFRICOM command and control, or was that handled still out of EUCOM, was it handled out of Washington? How did that work?

A They still stayed under, that evening, since it was prepare to deploy and not an execute order, they stayed under EUCOM command and control. If they would have deployed, then we would have had a change -- they would have been chopped, change of operational commander from EUCOM to AFRICOM when they deployed to the African continent.

Q Maybe you could help us walk through the distinction between prepare to deploy versus an execute order, for example. What does that mean?

A They are two very distinct orders in the military. The first is prepare to deploy.

Q Yeah.

A And that's basically guidance from my boss, in this case, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, that you have permission to make every preparation necessary to execute this mission. But you do not have permission to actually to

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

deploy them yet -- you don't have permission to execute the mission. So what I had was permission to move them and their gear to Sigonella, and they were then there prepared to deploy if they received an execute order to go execute whatever mission we told them.

Q Okay. And then, in these discussions about issuing the prepare to deploy order to the EUCOM C1F, obviously, there was a situation in Libya. Were you all also considering the region in general? I mean, we know that there were other incidents. There was the Cairo incident. Eventually, there was an incident in Tunis and Khartoum. Was that something that you were looking at as a holistic look at the region, the unrest there?

A Absolutely. Sigonella was picked for that specific location, because if you look at where Sigonella is, it is central in the Med. It is quickly deployable to Cairo if needed to back up Central Command, to Libya, to Tunisia. Any place in Northern Africa they could get to from there.

Q And I understand in the military, there is a maybe a series of other orders -- correct me if I am wrong -- my understanding is that an execute order is to actually go do a mission. We talked about prepare to deploy. Are there any other intermediate steps between prepare to deploy and execute, like a warning order or something like that? What does that look like?

A There could be other orders. In this particular situation, the prepare to deploy order was a verbal order to make sure that it -- and then followed up with official written orders. In this particular case, there could have been a warning order. Normally, in crisis, there would not. We would probably go directly from a prepare to deploy order, they would be stationed ready to go, and then we would go directly to an execute order.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Okay.

A If you have more time, you can have a series of other orders. You can have a planning order, a plan ord, you can then have a warning order that tells you -- first that says prepare the plan. Next you could have a warning order that says, okay, warning, we are setting H hour for the operation. And then the next thing might be the execute order. But in crisis, normally we would go from -- in this case, we would have went from prepare to deploy most likely directly to an execute order. In some cases, if the forces are already staged, you could go directly to an execute order.

Q Okay.

A In this case they weren't staged in the proper location with their gear. And so the direction from the Chairman and the Secretary was to prepare them to deploy.

Q And then you mentioned that with respect to the planning of what it would look like for that team once it was ready to do so, to get an execute order to conceivably go to Benghazi, what was the planning? What did that look like at AFRICOM specifically?

A Well, the CIF is a highly specialized, highly trained unit. What would happen is we would give them -- they would be assessing, along with us, the situation on the ground. They would be assessing what the mission potentially would be, what execution is required, what support, what command and control. They would be building a plan along with us in parallel.

Q I see.

A But they are so highly experienced that they more than likely, with general operational and strategic level guidance from Africa Command, they would

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

plan the tactical operation. They would then present a plan to General Ham for execution. And he would approve the execution plan.

Q I see.

A But they would do most of the detailed planning.

Q Given their experience, they have sort of an organic planning capacity.

A Yes. These are highly trained Special Forces, the best trained in the world. That's why they belong to these commander's in extremis forces. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So they are very capable.

Q So do you happen to know on that night if that unit had started that organic planning process?

A Absolutely.

Q You do?

A I know for a fact they did.

Q How do you know that?

A From reports that I got.

Q Okay. But at the time --

A Yes, real time. I know as soon as they were told to -- as soon as they were alerted, told to muster and get to their aircraft, they were informed that there was a potential mission where they would be inserted in Benghazi.

Q Okay.

A And they immediately started planning for that.

Q Okay. Now, we noticed, and referring to that timeline I put in front of you earlier, you can look at it if you want, but I have part of it here --

A I have it.

[REDACTED]

Q According to that DOD timeline, we talked about how there was a verbal order given sometime between midnight and 0200 Stuttgart time, Libya time, on 12 September. It wasn't until 1957 on 12 September, about 18 hours later, that the unit reached its intermediate staging area. Were you aware at the time of that deployment time how long that would be to reach that staging area?

A Yeah. Just let me catch up.

Q Sure.

A Okay.

Q 1957. Yes.

A Yes. I was tracking as it went along. Again, this is a very capable force. And my assessment was they were moving as quickly as possible.

Q Okay.

A But again, they were not co-located. So this requires co-location, loading of equipment, and then the flight time to get to Sigonella.

Q Do you happen to remember timewise how far they were from their aircraft?

A No. I don't know the details of -- of where the aircraft were and where they -- I just know that the CIF was in Croatia. I don't know where the aircraft were.

Q Fair enough. And then if I could just bracket now and talk about another Special Operations Force that is based in the U.S. that was also given verbal orders that night, was this force also in consideration by AFRICOM for utilization in Benghazi, to your knowledge?

A Are you referring to the Special Operations Force based in the United States.

Q Yes. Number three there.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q I believe it may.

[REDACTED]

Mr. Richards. That is my understanding.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

OR2 [REDACTED]

Q Sure.

A That force is really at the Secretary of Defense's direction. But when I was told that that force was now being prepared to deploy, we then have a -- we had done operations in the past in Africa with that force, and so we knew how to link up with their Command Center and start doing the coordination.

Q Sure. Sorry to jump around. Also on that timeline, DOD timeline, it talks about an 0230 conference call hosted by the National Military Command Center, which included representatives of AFRICOM and other commands. Were you on that call?

A Yes.

Q Okay. What was -- to your recollection what was the discussion there?

A I don't recall.

Q Okay.

A I had several conversations with the National Military Command

[REDACTED]

Center, near continuous through the night.

Q Do you recall was Benghazi, what was going on in Benghazi discussed to your recollection? If you don't recall that's fine. I know it was a long time ago.

A That was the focal point of every conversation that night.

Q Okay. And what about other events in the region? Do you recall if that was discussed as well?

A I don't recall. I am not sure. Are you referring to any specific events? I mean, we were talking about movements of forces in Europe. We were talking about looking for any other, you know, activity, protests, riots, attacks in North Africa. But as you might imagine, I was focused primarily on Benghazi.

Q Sure. Jumping around again, so our understanding is just in general, particularly in Africa, when you have a situation where you may need an evacuation of U.S. Government personnel in country if there is unrest, State Department personnel, military is often integrally involved in that noncombatant evacuation. Is that a fair understanding of it, the way it works?

A Yeah. That's a fair assessment, yes.

Q And in planning for those, does DOD coordinate with the State Department?

A Yes, absolutely.

Q I mean, there are actual plans is my understanding.

A Absolutely. We have a noncombatant evacuation operation plan for every Embassy in Africa.

Q And was there a -- to your knowledge, was there such a plan for the Embassy in Tripoli prior to the attack?

A There was.

Q Okay. Okay. And then it is also our understanding that prior to the fall of the Gadhafi government, so during Operation Odyssey Dawn, Unified Protector, and so forth, at one point there was of course no U.S. Embassy in Tripoli. The only U.S. diplomatic presence was in Benghazi when Ambassador Stevens was there as the special envoy to the rebellion, which was based in Benghazi. So we are aware that there was DOD planning for, if needed, an evacuation of those State Department personnel from Benghazi. I think the Keersarge may have been involved. Do you remember this?

A I remember that, yes.

Q Okay. And I guess so the reason I am asking these questions, I am just wondering, you had mentioned that on the night of the attack, you were surprised that there were State Department facility in Benghazi.

A Uh-huh.

Q Given the fact that the State Department would normally coordinate with DOD for noncombatant evacuation of its personnel if necessary, I am just wondering -- you can see where I am going -- I am wondering if the State Department had done that kind of coordination with AFRICOM, you know, after its Embassy reopened in Tripoli. I mean, did DOD or AFRICOM stay engaged with any potential evacuation that might have to happen for the residual State Department personnel that were still in Benghazi?

A Well, if I could take your narrative and say that the problem with your narrative is once Ambassador Stevens went to Benghazi during the revolution, he then moved to Tripoli.

Q Yeah.

A And we were wholly focused on the Ambassador and the Embassy in

[REDACTED]

Tripoli. There wasn't any remaining presence that I was aware of in Benghazi.

Q No, I think you are actually right on my question.

A And so -- and so from my perspective, we weren't focused on Benghazi. I mean, we were focused intelligence-wise on Benghazi because, as I talked about, the Al Qaeda threat that still existed in the area.

Q Yeah.

A Prior to this 9/11 event, Ambassadors traveled around their countries, and DOD is not informed, except for the small group of people that work at the Embassy, the defense attache.

Q Yeah.

A AFRICOM did not track where Ambassadors travel within their own country. My assessment is Ambassador Stevens was traveling within his own country.

Q Sure.

A That is not normally something that State would inform Department of Defense about.

Q No, yeah, no, I don't mean to --

A And so --

Q Yeah. I think actually the question is, is not whether DOD stayed apprised of the Ambassador's specific or discrete movements from place to place in his country. I think that we all understand that is not something you are in the business of doing. I think the question is, is that post the reopening of a U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, where now the Ambassador and the bulk of the U.S. diplomatic presence has now moved back to Tripoli, there is still retained in Benghazi a number of State Department civilians at a location there. And I guess my question is, did

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

DOD coordinate with the State Department -- or perhaps it may be fairer to say did State Department coordinate with DOD to make arrangements for those personnel to be evacuated with DOD assistance in the event that they needed it?

A Again, maybe I am not hearing your question.

Q Sure.

A I didn't know there were any remaining U.S. personnel in Benghazi.

Q Right.

A And so I don't know how we could have done planning for something that we didn't --

Q I think you are answering my question. That makes sense.

A -- didn't know exists.

Q So let me ask it like this. Sorry. So was there, to your knowledge, an evacuation plan for the State Department personnel in Benghazi?

A No, there was no plan for evacuation of personnel from Benghazi --

Q To your knowledge.

A -- because we didn't know there were any U.S. personnel in Benghazi.

Q Okay. That's helpful. You mentioned also, the night of the attack, that the first time that you had heard a request of any kind for military assistance, shooters you mentioned, was at the time of the mortar attack, which was about 0515. I am just wondering where did that request come from?

A I got the request from my task force liaison officer in the Command Center, which he said he was receiving from the task force personnel on the ground that were now at the Annex.

Q In Benghazi?

A In Benghazi, right. That is the only request that I got for direct military

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

assistance and shooters that I recall.

Q Okay. No, no, that's fine. Thank you.

We have also heard, and I am sure you have heard ex-post, after the fact, in the news, about Lieutenant Colonel [REDACTED] who was a U.S. Army officer with a four-person team that was known collectively as team Tripoli, that were in Tripoli, assisted the evacuation of the Americans from the Embassy in Tripoli to an Annex facility that was more secure in Tripoli. And that he then, upon evacuation of the Embassy to the Annex, called SOCAFRICA, which was a component command of AFRICOM, to notify SOCAFRICA of his intention to join a second response flight. You mentioned the C-130, the Libyan C-130, that flight. I am just wondering if you were aware at the time at all of his call or of the subsequent order from Admiral Losey for him to actually remain in Tripoli. Were you aware of it at the time that happened?

A No, that evening I had no knowledge of any conversations between Lieutenant Colonel [REDACTED] and Admiral Losey.

AR1 BY [REDACTED]:

Q Do you know Lieutenant Colonel [REDACTED] Had you ever talked to him?

A I didn't know Lieutenant Colonel [REDACTED] at that point. I knew there was a small team of military personnel that were left from the SST team that Team Libya has described that were there. The first time I heard his name was when questions about this issue arose when I was still at AFRICOM. I didn't know him.

Q Subsequent to the attack. The questions arose subsequent to the attack?

A Yes, sir.

AR2 BY [REDACTED]:

Q What about Colonel [REDACTED] Did you have any conversations

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

with him that night?

A No. His chain of command was to Admiral Losey.

Q Okay. Did you speak with him at any time prior to 9/11?

A I had met him when he came to that assignment. He was the JSOTF commander. So he did an office call to come meet me in Stuttgart. That is the only time I had ever talked to Colonel [REDACTED]

OR 2 BY [REDACTED]

Q And then with respect to -- we are almost done -- with respect to the C-17 for medical evacuation. I think you mentioned that that aircraft was coming from Germany. Is that correct?

A That's correct. It was coming from Ramstein.

Q Ramstein. So did you or someone in your command, were they in dialogue with Ramstein, with the air base there about that?

A Absolutely. We were in dialogue with European Command, the Air Component Command, Air Forces Africa, Air Forces Europe, and Transportation Command back in the United States to coordinate getting that medevac lift.

Q Sure. Do you happen to know if AFRICOM -- maybe not you -- but do you happen to know if anyone in your command at AFRICOM, were they in direct communication with Ramstein, or were all the communications then routed through EUCOM and then on down from there?

A No, there were communications at all various levels. In these types of crises and incidents, there is staff officers talking directly to staff officers, there is leaders talking to each other, and then combatant commands like me talking at the command level. So there was communications at all various levels that night.

Q Again, with respect to the C-17, I think you had mentioned

[REDACTED]

earlier -- correct me if I am misremembering what you said -- but that AFRICOM was considering medical evacuation pretty early on. Is that a fair --

A Absolutely. As soon as we heard there were casualties, the initial plan was to try to do a medevac out of Benghazi airfield.

Q So when would that have been that you first heard casualties that you started considering --

A I think we started to understand about -- we started to understand that there -- well, we knew that there were some casualties as soon as it was clear that the Ambassador was missing.

Q And the communicator was dead.

A And the communicator was dead.

Q Yeah.

A So we immediately started planning for evacuation, medical evacuation at that point.

Q That's helpful. Then with respect to that C-17, I think the timeline in front of you says that 0605 on 12 September, AFRICOM ordered a C-17 to Germany to, quote, "prepare to deploy to Libya to evacuate Americans." I am just wondering -- I know you were discussing it, or thinking about it earlier when you heard that there were first casualties earlier on. I am just wondering why it wasn't until 0605 that the actual order went to Germany?

A This time makes sense to me, because it's at this point that I know that this indirect attack is over, from the experts on the ground that they don't require direct military support or shooters, and that they want to evacuate. At this point, what I don't know is whether the aircraft is going to fly to Benghazi or Tripoli.

Q Sure.

[REDACTED]

A So it's later during this morning that we determine that the best place for the aircraft to go is Tripoli from a security standpoint and from the Libyans that provided the C-130 to get them back there. But this was the order to tell them to basically get the crew, get on the aircraft, you got to go get doctors and all the medical equipment and everything and load up the aircraft.

Q Sure.

A So, again, this is very early in the morning, but we want them to be ready to go. And then you can see later we give them the order to go to Tripoli.

Q Yeah. No. And I understand what you are saying about at the time not knowing where, where the aircraft would go. I guess one of the questions that we have is about -- my understanding of the prepare to deploy order is that you could start them sort of saying prepare to deploy, get your gear, you know, get the aircraft fueled, and obviously wake everybody up before you know necessarily where it's going.

A That had already happened.

Q I am sorry, go ahead.

A This says gave them the order to prepare to deploy to Libya. I have a very clear recollection of sometime about in the 0300, 0400 time frame to tell them to get the air crew and to get the doctors and everybody, and to get an aircraft, manned up, that we were going to need them at some point.

Q Sorry. So your recollection is that the prepare to deploy order may have happened before 0605. Is that what you are saying?

A I have to be careful how to characterize, because again, I didn't prepare this timeline.

Q Sure.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A I don't know exactly what this means. But I know that we were having staff conversations much earlier in the evening that said we are going to need C130s, C-17s, medevac capability, whether it is on one or the other plane, and that you need to start calling air crews and doctors and everything. And the issue that I remember in the early hours here was finding the right medical teams. They have to put very specific medical capability, depending on what the actual medical issues are. So, at that point, we know we have one person who is deceased. I don't have a clear understanding of what other injuries there are. Once I start getting reports after this indirect attack, I now start to understand casualties and others, we can then start to relay what are the very specific requirements we need on the aircraft.

Q Okay.

A This probably refers to now there is an official order. We know what the events -- this part of the event is over. We know what very specific casualties have occurred at that point. We can now give very specific mission direction to a medevac team about the capabilities that they need to bring.

Q Sorry. And so you knew it was over at what point?

A I am saying the indirect -- just like I said, the indirect attack started and then ended very quickly. It was over in a matter of minutes. Not to say that the event was over, but that specific one. And that the guys on the ground were very clearly mustering forces and moving to Benghazi airfield. So we had moved to another phase of this incident. Not to say they couldn't come under attack again.

Q Sure. Okay.

A But we were now in a very clear, in my mind, distinct planning phase where there is adequate security on the ground. They have a militia. They can move to Benghazi airfield. And now we are trying to help them get out of the country.

[REDACTED]

Q Okay. That's helpful. Thank you. And then just one last question with respect to the C-17. The official order here, whether there was an earlier discussion with Ramstein or not about, you know, before 0605 about preparing to deploy, the actual aircraft didn't deploy, depart Germany until 1415. To a lot of people, 8 hours seems like a long time to get an aircraft that was dedicated to medical evac airborne. So I guess the question is, to your knowledge, why did it take that long for the plane to take off after the notification?

A I don't know the details. I know that we were tracking it very closely. I do recall a conversation that there wasn't a specific C-17 already preconfigured ready to go. There was some configuration and staffing that had to occur to get the aircraft ready.

Q Sure.

A What was already in place was an aeromedic medevac capability that was very well exercised between the combatant theaters like Afghanistan back to Ramstein. But to get a plane prepared with the right medical personnel, with the right crew, with the right equipment, basically the plane had to be kind of -- not the plane had to be constructed, but the interior had to be constructed.

Q Configured would be a fair way to describe it.

A Configured. So recalling of the right personnel, getting the air crew, getting the brief. Remember, this is a country where we have to consider are there surface-to-air missile threats, so they need intelligence and many other things. So this, in my personal experience, this was actually a job very well done. And that's how I felt that day, that this wasn't a long delay. In fact, this was a very well done and executed mission to get them there that quickly.

Q Okay. Thank you. That's helpful. And I said last question about the

[REDACTED]

C-17. One last question. Obviously, this was a EUCOM plane. Is that correct?
In other words, this is not an AFRICOM plane?

A No, this C-17 plane was actually a TRANSCOM asset.

Q Oh, I see. Okay. But coming out of Ramstein?

A But coming out of Ramstein.

Q Okay. Very good. So what would the coordination process then look like? Was it AFRICOM speaking to TRANSCOM directly, or were you coordinating with EUCOM?

A In this case, we worked directly with Transportation Command.

Q Okay. Very good.

A But EUCOM would have had other forces at the base and that we would need, so we would be talking with EUCOM because they own -- you know, they own the airfield.

Q At least a three-way conversation?

A Yes, it was a very -- it was a three-way conversation to include the Joint Staff the entire way through.

Q Okay. Okay. I am just going to move to the post-attack questions.

ARI [REDACTED] Excuse me.

OR2 [REDACTED] Please.

ARI BY [REDACTED]

Q Admiral, going back to something you said at I think when we -- earlier, closer to the beginning of our discussions, you mentioned that in anticipation of the 9/11 anniversary, you and General Ham kind of considered the possible threat. I think you said you conducted a deep dive of some of the threats out there and so forth.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Uh-huh.

Q And then on the night of the attack, I think in explaining the circumstances, you talked about being in the FPOC, you kind of evaluated menu of response options that were potentially before you, and utilized those that were appropriate and available.

A Uh-huh.

Q And if I understand correctly that in your assessment, evaluation, consideration of that menu of options, certain facts were apparent, such as, as you mentioned, the CIF was in Croatia and was not co-located with its lift.

A Uh-huh.

Q That no fighters were on alert. The FAST was not co-located with its lift. Were you surprised by any -- each or any of these points when you were surveying that?

A I will go down the list.

Q Sure.

A I wouldn't say I was surprised. I don't normally know where the EUCOM CIF is. I didn't normally track that. The fact that they were in exercise is not surprising. They exercise frequently to maintain their military readiness. So not surprised. It was just a fact we had to deal with.

Q Sure.

A The FAST not being c-loaded with their aircraft, that was the posture prior to this event. FAST teams didn't normally have aircraft located with them. So I was not surprised. But I knew where the aircraft was that would link up with them and how to get them. What was the third piece?

Q No fighters on alert.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A And no, I was not surprised there were no fighters on alert.

Q So there is two ways, of course, to look at this. One is, as you explained it, that every capability -- I think you said every capability that was available was utilized. And then the step beyond that is the relatively limited capabilities which were available.

A Uh-huh.

Q And this gets back to what you were saying earlier. So, in anticipation of September 11th, in this deep dive of the various threats, did the command consider changing the posture in any way of those forces that it had in its control? I know the CIF is not among those. Or reach out to change a posture in any way?

A Okay. So just to be factually based, neither the CIF for the FAST nor the fighters, none of those were under Africa Command's control. Did we look to see whether we needed increased posture? Based on the intelligence review that we did, we didn't see a need to change the posture of any of those forces. There was nothing in the intelligence that would indicate we would need those forces.

Q Okay. So that's a good point. The posture that we have discussed reflects the intelligence and the threat as you understood it.

A Yes.

Q I see. Very good. Thank you. And then one specific question. In the menu of options that you considered or pulsed, were AC-130s ever on that list of possibilities to your recollection?

A AC-130s are a force that was available. They are stationed in the U.K. They have very limited legs. They are a long time to deploy. They couldn't get there any quicker than any of the other forces. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They were considered, but again, they were not readily deployable.

Q And I think you have answered the question, do you believe you had the necessary intelligence to deploy them?

A The intelligence that we needed was to understand what was going on on the ground there. And so it was very -- it was a very unknown environment. We had just had an event happen, where we later learned the Ambassador was killed, that we don't know real time who they were, what capability they had. We then had another event at the Annex where now we have indirect fire. So an escalation of enemy military capability, again not knowing what capability they have. And so everything we were evaluating that night was asking the question, what is the environment that we are deploying into? And if we deploy forces, are we putting more forces at risk? And could they also find themselves overmatched by the forces and capability there? Are we going into an ambush? Is this going to make the situation worse? All those questions were being asked that night.

Q Right. I see. Thank you.

AR2 [REDACTED] One more question. You had mentioned earlier this afternoon that AFRICOM was involved in a data call for the Accountability Review Board. Were you personally interviewed for the Accountability Review Board?

Admiral Leidig. No, I was not?

OR2 BY [REDACTED]:

Q I just have one question that I thought of while we were sitting here about the EUCOM CIF. You mentioned that they weren't under the control of

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

AFRICOM. But you had also mentioned that you were aware what their planning process -- what the planning process they had started for deployment to Benghazi. I am just curious how you were aware of that.

A Well, again, let me back all the way up so you understand the relationship.

Q Yeah.

A AFRICOM did not have a commander's in extremis force at the time assigned to us and available.

Q Right.

A But we had an agreement that if something should happen on the continent, we could coordinate with EUCOM, and with Secretary of Defense's permission employ their CIF to our continent. In addition, I have -- I am familiar, and many of the people on my staff are very familiar with what a CIF is and its capability based on our experience in the past. How do we know that we started planning? Because we got reports back through our Special Operations Command, who coordinates with them, and also our task force personnel that they were doing the planning.

Q Got it. So from SOCOM basically you were hearing -- not EUCOM per se?

A Not from SOCOM, but through -- because SOCAFRICA's actually operational command and control chain of command is through AFRICOM.

Q Yes.

A Their administrative command is through SOCOM. So one of our commands, SOCAFRICA, is coordinating directly with the CIF, because Admiral Losey would probably be the operational commander if they executed under us.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

And he was coordinating with them, and we were getting reports from his staff that they were already doing the planning and getting engaged.

Q Given it was a EUCOM CIF, would he then be -- I am sorry, Admiral Losey or SOCAFRICA be coordinating with their counterpart in EUCOM then? Is that how that would work?

A Absolutely. He was in communication with SOC here that night.

Q Just to be clear, you did hear from Admiral Losey then that they started that planning process?

A No. Let me -- I have to be very clear.

Q Sorry, yeah.

A I don't recall having a consideration where Admiral Losey and I discussed that they were planning. But I had reports from my staff and team --

Q I see.

A -- that the CIF was planning for an insertion into Benghazi.

Q Okay. That's helpful. Thank you. And then forgive me if it was brought up already, I know we just had the ARB question, I also wanted to ask you about an after-action review. To your knowledge, did the U.S. military conduct a formal after action review of what had taken place in Benghazi?

A By the U.S. military, who do you mean? For me that's a very broad statement.

Q Okay. Let me rephrase it. Did you participate in a formal after-action review of what had happened in Benghazi?

A With who?

Q With anybody, in the U.S. military. Did you participate? Let me ask you this.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Okay.

Q Have you done after-action reviews before after an engagement of some kind?

A Yeah. I have participated in after-action reviews before in my military career.

Q Did that happen this time with respect to what had happened in Benghazi?

A No. The guidance that we had at Africa Command was that the Accountability Review Board would review the incident in Benghazi and that we were to fully participate with the Accountability Review Board.

Q Okay.

A And that would be our after action review.

Q No, that's helpful. Thank you.

ORZ [REDACTED] Did you guys have anything else? So I think with that we will go off the record.

[Recess.]

ODI [REDACTED] We will go back on the record.

ODI BY [REDACTED]:

Q Admiral, thank you for your patience today. I know it's been a long day, with our unexpected interruption earlier. I just had a few follow-up questions on some of the statements that you have made earlier or in previous rounds.

One of the things I would like to talk about, I know that you kind of drilled in with some granularity on the DOD timeline, the official timeline that was distributed, specifically the 6:05 a.m., 0605 order to deploy, or prepare to deploy, rather, the C-17 from Ramstein. Can I ask, we had talked a little bit earlier about how information

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

was flowing up to you at AFRICOM and how the DAT was your principal means of communication, at least for a significant portion of the night. Were you aware at this time -- and I am going to ask this because I don't want to oversimplify the discussion of what it would take to perform an evac, or a medical evacuation. But were you aware, either through your DAT or through other means, that the Libyans were also preparing to send a C-130 on the morning of the attacks?

A Are you asking, was I aware that they were prepared to send a C-130 from Tripoli to Benghazi?

Q Correct.

A Yes. I knew from the DAT that the Libyans were looking for a way to help us get our guys out of Benghazi.

Q Okay. And did you know what purpose that C-130 was to serve in Benghazi?

A From my perspective, it was to load all the U.S. personnel onto the plane and fly it back to Tripoli.

Q Okay. And I know it's been 18 months now, so maybe your recollections on -- with specificity as to the minute to minute, but do you recall when about those arrangements or those preparations were being made to move the Libyan Air Force C-130 from Tripoli to Benghazi?

A No. I don't know.

Q Okay. But your DAT did have visibility into that, or may have even participated in those discussions. Is that your understanding?

A I would have expected, from the conversations we had, that our DAT was actively involved in talking to the Libyans about trying to get that capability. My understanding was he was actively working that.

[REDACTED]

Q Great. Thank you. One other matter. You had discussed how some of the reporting that was coming in to you painted perhaps an imperfect picture, that maybe it was incomplete information, and the decisions you were making were based on the best information you had available at the time. I just wanted to ask a specific question. You mentioned for us, I believe in the first hour, that your operations center had a liaison from another governmental agency there. But you had mentioned that they weren't in contact with their people in Benghazi. Do you happen to know why that was the case?

A No, I don't know.

Q Okay. Did that surprise you at all that you weren't receiving information directly from that entity?

A I would say that -- you have to think about this the way the information came to me. It was a long period of time before I understood that there were personnel on the ground. How they were communicating with anybody, I don't know. I don't have any insight how the personnel on the ground were communicating with anybody. My liaison that was there in the command center that night, I have a couple people from that work in my command. The gentleman that was in our command center that night was our senior intel analyst. So I don't know if he had the capability or the linkages to talk to those folks on the ground. I just don't -- I just don't know. But I wasn't getting any reporting from my liaison in my command center that night.

Q Okay. And so the two task force members or the two DOD personnel, they were reporting in through a task force liaison? Is that correct?

A My understanding is they were reporting through task force chain of command. And the task force has an amazing capability where everyone can see

[REDACTED]

the communications in a chat room. So they were communicating with others in the task force. And my liaison could see those communications and was getting some of the reporting. And then later, during the indirect attack, some of the specific requests were directly to Africa Command.

Q There was a conversation about the specialized skills that some of the teams or some of the forces brought to the table. You had mentioned that the FAST team is capable of performing a variety of missions. I was wondering if you could just elaborate on that. Why I am asking this question is I just want to understand you clearly, that we are not trying to diminish in any way the capabilities of that force, but perhaps when compared with other forces that were in fact deployed that night that may have had more specialized tool kits. But this team was still a robust team, or can you just maybe comment or opine on their ability?

A I mean the FAST platoons are very capable for what we need them to do. So they can be used to move to a location and provide security. They can be deployed out on ships. Since they are Marines, they are used to working with the Navy. So they bring a kind of a different skill set than the highly specialized CIF,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The FAST is some very specially trained young Marines, led -- normally the company might have an 04 as the commander, and the platoons are led by a captain. So what you are getting is a young Marine captain with young enlisted Marines as the primary capability. When you compare that to a task force that will have these warriors that have been trained for 20, 25 years, and they are very senior NCOs or they are very highly capable,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

trained Special Forces, they are just completely different in terms of planning capability.

And then what makes the CIF highly specialized is they come with hardened vehicles and a higher end of military equipment and arming. The Marines, they will come with their rifles. They will come with maybe M-50s, and then they might come with some light anti-armor-type equipment. But they are not a self-deployable capability. They depend on other units to help them deploy and be ready to accomplish their mission. So the big distinction is you just can't take and drop them in without other supporting units and other supporting equipment, unlike the CIF comes wholly contained. And basically, if they can get with their equipment and get on their aircraft, as long as the mission is within their capability, they can come in and complete the mission.

Q Okay. Regarding the discussion about the noncombatant evacuation operations and your coordination with the State Department, I believe I heard you say during the last round that, again, you weren't aware that there was a facility in Benghazi. And I guess just looking back, is it your understanding that that may have been the case because it was a Temporary Mission Facility, or it wasn't a facility that was utilized in a large degree by the State Department?

A Again, in our AOR, we have 54 countries. Our plans are focused on the Embassies. State Department has many other facilities in countries, not just consulates or Temporary Mission Facilities, but with USAID and others. Prior to 9/11, we did not -- this 9/11 in 2012, we didn't focus on those other facilities. They were the responsibility of State Department. So it's not surprising to me that State Department had some kind of facility in Benghazi, if they wanted to do business there, that we weren't aware of. Because there would be many, many facilities in many,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

many countries that's not on the list of things that DOD is aware of or tracks.

Q Okay. And are you aware if any of their evacuation planning may have been coordinated with another governmental entity in Benghazi?

A I am not aware of -- I am not aware of any planning that they had done for Benghazi.

OD2 [REDACTED] I can take one question off if I can just ask it right here.

OD2 BY [REDACTED]

Q Does the evacuation planning change the posture of where DOD military airlift capability is throughout the world? Does it affect that at all?

A It could. It would depend on what the planning and what the military requirements are. And remember State Department is responsible for the evacuation of their Embassy. So, in any NEO plan, the first option is for State Department to contract airlift, sealift, and other things to get American citizens out of the country. It is only when State Department doesn't have the capability that they then come to the Department of Defense. We do joint planning with them to build the military options to support the Ambassador's overall noncombatant evacuation operation plan.

And so if capabilities were identified that an Ambassador needed for a NEO, we would look to see if we have those capabilities, or in our case, we would look to see if those capabilities were aware in Europe. In many cases, because the United States and Embassies are spread around the world, we don't have capabilities ready to get to every Embassy immediately. But we identify those in capability gap assessments that I provide back to the Joint Staff on a quarterly basis. So what I would do is if there was a capability that we thought we needed to do an operation and I didn't have that available, then I would identify that as a needed capability.

[REDACTED]

ODI BY [REDACTED]

Q Is that part of the new normal or was that --

A Well, even in the old one, even before new normal. And then we would make an assessment, are there military capabilities that can be provided by DOD? I think, as you all well know, there are many more requests of the Department of Defense for military capabilities than there are assets available around the world. And that would be evaluated by folks back in DC who see the whole joint force and decide what part of the joint force is allocated to what combatant commands. There are many in AFRICOM -- in Africa, there are many unmet military capabilities that we were a small combatant command, where we don't have capabilities to meet every military mission.

Q Is that compounded in any way by the size of your AOR?

A Oh, absolutely. I mean, when I talk to people you have to remember that Africa is as big as the United States three times. And so you can fit the United States three times in the continent of Africa. And the distance, you know, from Europe to South Africa, it is a 12-, 13-, 14-hour flight. There are just not many capabilities you can reach in many places in Africa, unless you had capabilities stationed on the continent, ready to respond. Now, with new normal, we started to move more assets to the southern tier of Europe, we moved more capability into Djibouti, so that we could try to respond to some of those other locations more quickly.

[REDACTED]

RPTS JANSEN

DCMN HERZFELD

[2:07 p.m.]

OD2 BY [REDACTED]

Q Now let me ask, prior to the attacks at the special mission compound, what would drive force posture? Would it be intelligence, or would it be dates, such as 9/11?

A You said "special mission facility."

Q I'm sorry, the Benghazi Temporary Mission Facility, the place where the Ambassador was on the night of the attacks.

A And so could you say the question again? Because I was really trying to think of what you were referring to.

Q Yes, sir. You were asked some questions earlier about your force posture.

A Uh-huh.

Q And what -- you know, how were you at a certain force posture, and what is that based on? And I think that you said that intelligence typically drives your force posture?

A Well, I mean, it's a whole variety of things. There's a very detailed planning process we could use. Intelligence would drive part of it, but it would also be what -- and under intelligence we would look at our capabilities, and we would look at enemy capabilities and enemy intentions. You know, and so in this particular case, on 9/11, the threat is normally from terrorist organizations. So we're trying to understand what their intentions might be, and then couple that with what their capabilities might be, and then how we would need to respond if there was an attack.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q And so during the period leading up to the Benghazi attacks, what you were worried about within the AFRICOM map? What were your issues that kept you open late?

A Okay. So intelligence did not indicate that there were any Al Qaeda enemy intentions to conduct an attack in Africa. Prior to this 9/11, nor post-9/11, any review ever found any intelligence that said they were -- so that's the intention part. So from our perspective there was no intention on that day.

So then we look at what is their capability and what might they do with that. And so we know that there are small groups of Al Qaeda with militias in Libya. We know that there are Al Qaeda groups in Tunisia. We know that there are Al Qaeda groups in Mali. We know that there's Boko Haram in Nigeria. We know that there are Al Qaeda groups, Al-Shebaab, in Somalia. We know that there are Al Qaeda groups in Kenya. And so we're aware of where Al Qaeda groups are all across of Africa. The question is what might they do on 9/11. Our best assessment was there might be a small attack of some sort, a terrorist attack, a vehicle-borne IED, suicide vest IED, or an attack like that.

We didn't see the intention nor the capability where someone would organize for an attack against a U.S. facility, but there might be a VBID or a suicide vest IED attack against a U.S. facility, but not the type of attack that we saw this night, particularly the attack that occurred at 5:15 that clearly was a military capability, which later turned out to be mortars. That was not the type of attack that we thought they had the capability of putting together.

ODI BY [REDACTED]

Q When you say "Al Qaeda groups," are you referring to kind of the core Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda central, or are you referring to --

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A No, I mean -- I'm sorry. I'm answering too quickly.

We -- the term that I used and is commonly used is "Al Qaeda allies and affiliates." So there's Al Qaeda core in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. We're well familiar with that. There are other folks that are affiliates, they are officially endorsed organizations -- that's like Al-Shebaab now, the Al Qaeda group in Yemen, Al Qaeda in Iraq -- where they have -- they are an official franchise essentially. And then there are others that consider themselves allied with it, so they have the same intent, but they're not officially endorsed. So Ansar Al-Sharia, for instance, in Libya, is a group that has lots of connections. They know many of the fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but they're not an officially endorsed organization, nor have they organized to the point where they would -- Al Qaeda would endorse them as one of them. But they have like goals in mind.

And so we knew that some of the folks in eastern Libya have -- support Al Qaeda's larger vision, they have sent fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan in the past, that they're experienced fighters, and they're back in Libya, and that they're there.

But they are only interspersed amongst organizations. We hadn't seen anything that said that they had organized into a very tightly organized and ready-to-execute-operation-type operation. But they were always aspirational, you know, to conduct some sort of maybe terrorist activity.

Q Okay. Is it the case that there were, in fact, two separate Ansar Al-Sharias, one perhaps at Benghazi and one a Derna-based --

A Well, Ansar Al-Sharia is actually a fairly common name. And so, yes, there are groups that have an Ansar Al-Sharia label in Derna, in Benghazi, and you'll see them in other places, Ansar Al-Sharia organization in Tunisia. So that's a fairly common name. I don't recall exactly what it stands for.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

OD2 [REDACTED] I think I'm good.

OD1 [REDACTED] Admiral, we'd like to take the opportunity to thank you, and I think on behalf of everyone here. With the consent of our majority counterparts as well, thank you again for your service, and we really appreciate you speaking with us here today. Thank you.

Go off the record.

[Whereupon, at 2:13 p.m., the interview concluded.]

[REDACTED]