

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 14, 2013

The Honorable John McCain
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators McCain, Graham, and Ayotte:

I write to address concerns that have been raised by you and the Armed Services Committee in connection with its consideration of former Senator Chuck Hagel's nomination to be Secretary of Defense, in particular concerns raised in your February 12 letter to the President. This Administration has repeatedly made clear its commitment to understanding the facts and circumstances surrounding the September 11-12, 2012 attack on our diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya that resulted in the killing of four Americans. Indeed, Secretary Clinton immediately convened an Accountability Review Board ("ARB") after the attack, and the Administration has accepted, and begun to implement, each and every one of ARB's recommendations.

As the ARB Report makes clear, the interagency response to the attack from Washington was "timely and appropriate." The ARB Report further notes that:

"...there simply was not enough time given the speed of the attacks for armed U.S. military assets to have made a difference. Senior-level interagency discussions were underway soon after Washington received initial word of the attacks and continued through the night. The Board found no evidence of any undue delays in decision making or denial of support from Washington or from the military combatant commanders. Quite the contrary: the safe evacuation of all U.S. government personnel from Benghazi twelve hours after the initial attack and subsequently to Ramstein Air Force Base was the result of exceptional U.S. government coordination and military response and helped save the lives of two severely wounded Americans. In addition, at the State

Department's request, the Department of Defense also provided a Marine FAST (Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team) as additional security support for Embassy Tripoli on September 12."

This intensive response, which was directed by the President, included 13 meetings of interagency Principals and Deputies within a week of the attack and involved continuous outreach by senior administration officials to the Government of Libya, including by the President and members of his Cabinet. As to the specific question in your February 12 letter, Secretary Clinton called Libyan President Magariaf on behalf of the President on the evening of September 11, 2012 to coordinate additional support to protect Americans in Libya and access to Libyan territory. At that time, President Magariaf expressed his condemnation and condolences and pledged his government's full cooperation. The President spoke to President Magariaf on the evening of September 12.

This Administration has cooperated with the Armed Services Committee and the Congress to provide an extensive amount of information. Senior Administration officials have participated in 20 member and staff briefings; 10 congressional hearings; 6 witness interviews; and have responded to over 40-Benghazi related inquiries from Congress, producing 10,000 pages of documents. We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the Committee moving forward, and we continue to urge the full Senate to act swiftly and confirm former Senator Hagel as the next Secretary of Defense.

Sincerely,



Kathryn H. Ruemmler
Counsel to the President

cc: The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510