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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

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December 27, 2011

ACTION MEMO FOR UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY - M

FROM: NEA – Jeffrey Feltman

SUBJECT: Future of Operations in Benghazi, Libya

Recommendation 1:

That you approve a continued U.S. presence in Benghazi through the end of calendar year 2012; and that you approve a combined footprint of 35 U.S. government personnel in Benghazi, including eight State Department and USAID and two TDY beds.

Approve

Disapprove

Recommendation 2:

That you approve the release of the existing State Department lease in Benghazi on Villa A; and that you approve the retention of Villas B and C for office and residential space for the State Department presence.

Approve

Disapprove

Background

The Transitional National Council (TNC) recently declared Libya liberated and moved the center of TNC operations from Benghazi to Tripoli. Chris Stevens, the Department's original Special Envoy to the TNC, has been replaced by Bureau of Political Military Affairs officer Mike Miller, who previously served at Embassy Tripoli. Entry level officer Nathan Tek transitioned to Tripoli in mid-December and USAID has shifted its permanent presence to Tripoli. Because of budget constraints and the reduced footprint, Diplomatic Security's current presence consists of two Special Agents, with an additional three slots currently unfilled.

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With Information Management Officer (IMO)/Management Officer Dana Pierce, the permanent presence in Benghazi is five, down from an approved footprint of 17. The current leases are paid through February 4, 2012, and extendable at our discretion through 2015.

Although our presence in Benghazi has shrunk considerably since the reopening of the Embassy in Tripoli, I would like to maintain a small State-run presence in Benghazi through the end of calendar year 2012, to include the critical summer elections period. Headed by an FS-02 or GS-14 officer, this office would work in close coordination with Tripoli on political and economic reporting, public diplomacy and commercial work in the eastern part of Libya and serve as "host" for the activities of USAID, PM, and any other U.S. government TDY personnel in Benghazi. Because this would be a smaller operation, Benghazi would continue to be supported by one IRM TDYer for communications and management issues and one NEA TDY reporting officer in addition to the TDY head of operations. NEA also would support the continuation of an LES PSA position to provide translation, policy, and administrative support. With the full complement of five Special Agents, our permanent presence would include eight U.S. direct hire employees, two slots for TDY PM and USAID officers, and one LES program assistant.

A continued presence in Benghazi will emphasize U.S. interest in the eastern part of Libya. Many Libyans have said the U.S. presence in Benghazi has a salutary, calming effect on easterners who are fearful that the new focus on Tripoli could once again lead to their neglect and exclusion from reconstruction and wealth distribution and strongly favor a permanent U.S. presence in the form of a full consulate. They feel the United States will help ensure they are dealt with fairly. TNC officials have said some government agencies may shift their headquarters to Benghazi (such as the National Oil Company). Other government agencies and corporations already have their headquarters in Benghazi and will likely remain there for the foreseeable future. The team will be able to monitor political trends (Islamists, tribes, political parties, militias) and public sentiment regarding the "new Libya," as well as report on the critical period leading up to and through Libya's first post-Qadhafi elections. Programmatic benefits to a continued U.S. presence in Benghazi include building on USAID/OTI's programs to strengthen civil society groups, media training, and capacity building in municipal councils. We should continue to engage with the populace, particularly with the large population of Libyan youth, an important and receptive audience with high expectations for the post-revolution period.

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Italy, Tunisia, Morocco, Malta, Finland, Turkey, Egypt, Sweden, Sudan, and the Palestinian Authority all have consulates in Benghazi. In informal conversations, representatives of the United Kingdom and French have said their governments would be unlikely to maintain offices there for budgetary reasons. The European Union and the United Nations have not announced whether they will maintain long-term presences in Benghazi.

Facilities

The current Benghazi State platform (Villas A, B, and C) is a 13-acre walled compound with 3.5 villas, office space, and a dining hall. Although all groups have come to the conclusion that co-location is the best and most economical option for continued presence, the State presence cannot be accommodated at the annex, and the current State facility is not large enough to permit co-location. Tripoli Facility Manager George Ibarra recently traveled to Benghazi to study a proposed villa compound (Villa D – see Tab) adjacent to the annex property and determined that the electrical, plumbing and physical security work needed to bring the facility up to an acceptable standard would negate any cost savings of the move.

The current Villa Compound is much larger than we need for the duration of our presence in Benghazi. We currently pay \$70,000/month for the three properties (A - \$28,000/month, B - \$14,000/month, and C - \$28,000/month). NEA proposes to release the Villa A property and use Villa C for residential and Villa B for offices, dining facility, and TDY housing. If you agree with this course of action, NEA will work with DS to rapidly implement a series of corrective security measures as part of the consolidation of the State footprint. We have one-year leases renewable for up to three additional one-year periods on these villas, with an option to terminate without financial penalty after the first six months, with sixty days notice. In order to avoid any additional rent payments on Villa A, NEA proposes to give immediate notice of termination, but would like to retain the leases on Villas B and C through the end of calendar year 2012 or until such time as an appropriate alternate property can be found that would allow for co-location of all U.S. government personnel in Benghazi.

Attachment:

Tab – Benghazi proposal

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Approved: NEA/FO: Jeffrey D. Feltman

JDF
for

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with edits suggested by PM