

*S. 980, The Embassy Security and Personnel Protection Act of 2013*

*Opening Remarks by Chairman Robert Menendez*

*Senate Foreign Relations Committee – July 16, 2013*

Today our real focus is ensuring the security of our missions abroad and the safety of our Foreign Service personnel. That has always been – and will remain -- a priority of this Committee.

Having said that, I hope to have the support of my Republican colleagues for the Embassy Security Act I have introduced -- named for Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty who gave their lives in service to the nation in Benghazi on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

The lessons we've learned from the tragedies in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Benghazi – are emblematic of the broader issue we will increasingly face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – and it will require our full, unequivocal, unwavering commitment to fully protecting our embassies and those who serve this nation abroad.

We have studied what went wrong. We have looked back. Now it's time to look forward and do what needs to be done to prevent another tragedy in the future.

After Benghazi, the Accountability Review Board made 29 recommendations to State and to Congress. While we must do our part in overseeing State's implementation, we must also do our part to provide the resources and necessary authorizations to ensure full implementation. We must make whatever investments are necessary to protect our embassies and missions.

Such investments are not an extravagance. They are not simply another budget item. We must strike the proper balance between sealing off vulnerabilities in high threat areas and continuing to conduct vigorous and effective diplomacy that serves the national interest.

The fact is we can never have absolute security in an increasingly dangerous world unless we hermetically seal our diplomats in steel tanks, but security alone is not our objective. At the end of the day, this is not an either-or-choice. We need to address both the construction of new embassies that meet security needs and we

need to do what we can to secure existing high risk posts where we need our people to represent our interests and where new construction is not an option.

The ARB stated it clearly – and I quote: *“The solution requires a more serious and sustained commitment from Congress to support State Department needs, which, in total constitute a small percentage both of the full national budget and that spent for national security. One overall conclusion in this report is that Congress must do its part to meet this challenge and provide necessary resources to the state Department to address security risks and meet mission imperatives.”*

The bill I have introduced is part of the solution – a serious and sustained commitment that takes the lessons we’ve learned and turns them into action.

As I said, total security is next to impossible. Our diplomats cannot encase themselves in stone fortresses and remain effective and disengagement is clearly not an option. So, the solution must be multifaceted. It must include enhanced physical security around our embassies and ensure that our diplomats are equipped with the language skills and security training necessary to keep them safe when they come out from behind the embassy walls to do their jobs.

It also requires us to ensure that the persons protecting out missions are not selected simply because they are the cheapest available force.

Where conditions require enhanced security, this bill gives State additional flexibility to contract guard forces based on the best value, rather than the lowest bidder.

It also means holding people accountable. When an employee exhibits unsatisfactory leadership that has serious security consequences, the Secretary must have the ability to act. This bill gives the Secretary greater flexibility in disciplinary actions in the future.

It authorizes funding for key items identified by the Accountability Review Board on Benghazi, including embassy security and construction; Arabic language training; and construction of a Foreign Affairs Security Training Center to consolidate and expand security training operations for State Department personnel so that instead of piecing together our training at facilities up and down the east

coast, we streamline them in a single facility that can provide comprehensive training to more people.

Lastly, the bill requires detailed reports from the Department on its progress in implementing all of the recommendations made by the Accountability Review Board and specifically requires the identification of -- and reporting on -- security at high-risk, high-threat facilities.

At the end of the day, if we fail to act, if we fail to address these issues there will be another incident. The responsibility is ours and the failure to act will be ours as well. This is the time for solutions. The safety of those who serve this nation abroad is in our hands.