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## DEFENSE ACT SEEKS MORE MARINE GUARDS

*In wake of Benghazi attack, 1,000 security personnel sought at embassies, consulates*

By: Gretel C. Kovach - December 20, 2012

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The deadly Sept. 11 attack in Benghazi, Libya, that laid bare “grossly inadequate” security for the U.S. diplomatic mission and confusion among State Department personnel is prompting the government to send in the Marines.

None were guarding the consulate when it was assaulted by militants, resulting in the deaths of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans. Afterward, about 50 Marines from a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team, or FAST, were dispatched to Libya to buttress diplomatic security.

Now the National Defense Authorization Act for 2013 headed to Congress for final approval this week includes an increase of as many as 1,000 Marine Security Guards at U.S. embassies and consulates.

More than 1,200 are stationed now in more than 130 countries, as well as 150 at the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group headquarters and schoolhouse at Quantico, Va., according to the Marine Corps.

They provide internal security, primarily to protect classified documents. They also guard personnel and respond to crises such as riots, earthquakes or assaults like the one in Benghazi.

The potential boost by more than 75 percent in personnel assigned to the Marine Security Guard Program is probably “necessary but hardly sufficient” to properly secure U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, said David Isenberg, an adjunct scholar with the Cato Institute, Navy veteran, and author of the book “Shadow Force: Private Security Contractors in Iraq.”

“Hiring more Marines is certainly a useful step insofar as guarding embassies,” Isenberg said. However, “if protection of American diplomats and foreign service personnel in other countries is the goal, then that’s clearly not going to do it. Unless you assume that they are never going to venture forth from their embassies, ever.”

The State Department is asking Congress for more than \$1.3 billion to boost security, out of contingency funds once allocated for Iraq: \$553 million for additional Marine security

guards, \$130 million for civilian diplomatic security personnel and \$691 million for installation improvements, officials told The New York Times.

Approximately 90 percent of U.S. diplomatic security personnel are private contractors, according to Deborah Avant, a scholar with a doctorate from the University of California San Diego who oversees The Private Security Monitor, an independent research project on government contracting.

The State Department began relying more on security contractors during the late 1980s and '90s military downsizing, analysts said. Then demand boomed during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, accelerating the trend.

In Benghazi, the State Department contracted with a small British security firm, Blue Mountain Group. The 20 or so Libyan men hired to guard the consulate were lightly armed, if at all, and included some with no security experience, Reuters reported.

An independent inquiry panel into the Benghazi attack found a lack of coordination and “real confusion,” in Washington and in the field, over State Department security provisions and policy, according to an unclassified version of the report released Tuesday.

Mismanagement and poor oversight of growing legions of private security forces employed by the State and Defense departments grew acute during the height of the wars, according to several government investigations.

In recent years, the Pentagon has significantly improved its control and accounting of private contractors, but the State Department remains much less organized, Isenberg said. “It’s got a long painful road ahead of it. And if it thinks that it will be enough merely getting more money to hire more private security contractors without taking a very deep, serious, penetrating look at the way it” oversees that force, “then we are doomed to have more of these tragedies.”

A spokesman for the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, which oversees the Marine security guard program and civilian security personnel, referred questions about embassy protection to the main State Department Bureau of Public Affairs. That bureau did not respond Wednesday to a query about how the additional security personnel would be deployed.