

This week, a congressional panel started the first of several inquiries into the organized attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya, which left four Americans dead.

Among those murdered was Christopher Stevens, the U.S. Ambassador to Libya. He is only the fourth Ambassador in the entire history of our country to be assassinated. The incident raises serious questions about Embassy security, State Department practices, and the ability of our country to maintain a secure diplomatic presence in countries where terrorism also finds a home or haven.

Throughout the Middle East in recent months, U.S. diplomatic compounds and embassies have been targeted by protests, and we never hear about countless attempts to carry out assaults like the one in Libya.

U.S. embassies are not foreign soil. They are sovereign American territory within the borders of countries that sometimes harbor terrorist and criminal elements, whether they are fighting with us to remove those threats or not. It is vital to understand the threats. Often, U.S. embassies are the nearest American target for terrorists seeking to launch an attack against our nation from overseas. They are outposts in dangerous, dangerous places.

And, as U.S. soil, it is a national security priority to protect the presence of our sovereignty under exceedingly vulnerable circumstances, as well as the Americans serving there in a military and a diplomatic presence. In Libya, there was a catastrophic failure.

Many things will likely be discovered to have gone horribly wrong in Libya. Warnings about an impending attack were not heeded. Security was not up to standard. Protocols were easily disrupted. Valuable intelligence was stolen. Americans lost their lives defending the Ambassador and the consulate. And our relationships with a newly-democratic Libya have been severely strained as a result.

The terrorists who struck at our compound in Benghazi deliberately chose September 11th to make their attack. They carefully planned their assault, they assembled the overwhelming force necessary to overrun the American facility, and they celebrated the evil they committed. It is too

late to stop the Benghazi attack, but it is not too late for us to bring a new sense of urgency to the task of better securing our diplomatic presence when we send out Ambassadors to do the work of our nation.

We can start by funding embassy and diplomatic security out of the exorbitant budgets for foreign aid given to the nations in which our diplomatic missions are being attacked. Never should the well-being of a foreign government exceed our interest in securing the safety of our own.

Our diplomats and our American foreign policy are housed in embassies and compounds like the one in Benghazi all over the world. They are proof to many troubled nations that, as Reagan said, we are a nation dedicated to lifting the bushel basket from over the lamp of freedom. Our diplomacy is important, and so are the lives of the devoted diplomats who deliver that diplomacy from a free people.