



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 14, 2012

Obama Under Fire for Failure to Defend Free Speech Amid Embassy Crisis

The Obama administration is being heavily criticized over its response to the ongoing crisis surrounding American diplomatic missions in the Middle East and North Africa, turmoil that has seen Islamist mobs attack [multiple embassies](#) and has already [claimed the life of U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens](#). Among other elements, critics slammed the president's failure to vigorously defend free speech rights and explain it to the world.



Even before the mob violence in Cairo on September 11 culminated in Islamists scaling the U.S. embassy walls, American officials were issuing statements condemning a crude YouTube video depicting the Islamic Prophet Mohammed as a murderous pedophile. Incredibly, the administration, instead of preparing to defend U.S. diplomatic missions, repeatedly referred to the exercise of free speech in a way that some may find offensive as an "abuse" of that right.

"The Embassy of the United States in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims," the U.S. Embassy in Egypt said in an official statement before being [overrun by a frenzied mob](#), which burned the American flag and replaced it with an Islamist banner used by extremists worldwide. "We firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others."

After the embassy was breached, it released another statement on Twitter: "This morning's condemnation (issued before protest began) still stands."

The half-baked embassy comments led to a political firestorm as GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney and commentators across America slammed what was perceived as an "apology" over American free speech rights and "sympathizing" with the attackers. "It's disgraceful that the Obama administration's first response was not to condemn attacks on our diplomatic missions, but to sympathize with those who waged the attacks," Romney said in a statement.

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus added: "Obama sympathizes with attackers in Egypt. Sad and pathetic."

After the worldwide uproar among critics over the Obama administration's failure to promptly and unabashedly stand up for the unalienable right to freedom of expression guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the White House quickly disowned the embassy's comments. "The statement by Embassy Cairo was not cleared by Washington and does not reflect the views of the United States government," an unnamed administration official [told](#) Politico.

However, despite the effort to distance Obama from the embassy's controversial statement, the president echoed those sentiments repeatedly in subsequent remarks. "Since our founding, the United States has been a nation that respects all faiths," he [claimed](#) in a speech. "We reject all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others."



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U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also repeatedly condemned the video instead of explaining that Americans have a right to say whatever they like and the government has no business approving of it or not. "It appears to have a deeply cynical purpose, to denigrate a great religion and to provoke rage," Clinton said, calling the video "disgusting and reprehensible." Noting that the U.S. government was not involved in the video, she added: "We absolutely reject its content and message."

In a separate statement, Clinton said, "The United States deplores any intentional effort to denigrate the religious beliefs of others.... Our commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation."

Critics of the administration's response — libertarians, conservatives, and even liberals — said Obama should have taken the chance to educate the world on free speech protections instead of condemning the video. More than a few analysts and lawmakers also rejected the effort to retract the U.S. embassy statement.

"The one thing I can guarantee you is that the White House saw that, they approved the statement that went out, and that sounds exactly like the words that none other than the President Obama would use," said Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), adding that the embassy attacks were a result of Obama's foreign policy of "appeasement" and that aid should be cut off. "That's been his policy now for four years. It's a failed policy; it doesn't work. This is our opportunity to change that policy."

Conservative and libertarian groups in the United States slammed the administration's response, too. "It's up to our embassies to remind publics overseas that our government's authority over filmmakers (and writers, and orators) is rightly limited," [wrote](#) the conservative Heritage Foundation's Rich Tucker. "Our government isn't responsible for the content of movies made, books written, or blogs posted by Americans. Nor should it condemn or condone the content of free speech. That's a complicated message, but one that foreigners need to hear again and again."

Newspapers across the United States also slammed the administration's failure to explain American values — free speech in particular — while addressing the controversy. An editorial in the *Baltimore Sun*, for example, while criticizing Romney's statements, [added](#) that the presidential hopeful was correct in pointing out that the Obama administration failed to properly defend America's unwavering belief in free expression.

In Israel, the criticism was fierce as well. "September 11, 2012, should go down in history as the day the American diplomatic corps officially attacked one of its country's most cherished values, one that has set it apart from much of the world for the past 236 years of independence," [wrote](#) columnist Seth Frantzman in the *Jerusalem Post*. "The U.S. government must immediately remove from their positions whoever penned this offensive condemnation of freedom of speech."

According to Frantzman, the embassy in Cairo should have used the incident as an opportunity to expose how Egyptians were being misled by radical incitement in the state-run media. Instead, the U.S. diplomatic corps "shamed itself by siding with a mob of fanatics acting on baseless claims, and condemned freedom of speech." The piece also slammed the notion that free speech is "abused" because somebody feels offended or religion is criticized.

While the U.S. government was busy [preparing a \\$1-billion bailout for the ruling Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt](#), the largely state-run Egyptian media was stirring up a mob to converge on the American embassy. Top officials with the newly elected government, while condemning the violence, also demanded that action be taken against those responsible for the film.



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"We ask the American government to take a firm position toward this film's producers within the framework of international charters that criminalize acts that stir strife on the basis of race, color or religion," [said](#) Egyptian Prime Minister Hisham Kandil, apparently oblivious to the First Amendment. The new totalitarian-minded president of Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi, also [reportedly](#) asked his embassy in the United States "to take appropriate legal measures against the producers of the film." He did not specify what measures should be taken.

Liberty-minded Americans and even lawmakers responded to the violence and the anti-free speech frenzy drummed up by certain Islamic leaders to be met with a simple response: an end to foreign aid for any governments involved. Others said the U.S. government should seize the opportunity to educate people about free speech, serving as a model to other rulers around the world who consistently violate citizens' unalienable right to express themselves.

Protests reportedly surrounding the controversial YouTube video, which many analysts have instead [attributed to blowback against lawless U.S. foreign policy](#), have been raging for four days. The unrest continues to spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa even after frenzied mobs invaded the U.S. embassies in Egypt and Yemen.

In Libya, attackers hit the American consulate with rockets and gun fire, killing the U.S. ambassador and three others. The U.S. government, meanwhile, has [vowed](#) to continue unconstitutionally showering taxpayer money on Islamic extremists and dictators from [Syria](#) and [Yemen](#) to [Egypt](#) and [everywhere in between](#).

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Photo: In this Sept. 12, 2012 file photo, President Barack Obama speaks in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington: AP Images



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