



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 14, 2012

Republicans Troubled by Romney Remarks on Embassy Attacks

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney left some of his fellow Republicans and media allies troubled by his eagerness to condemn the Obama administration's response to Tuesday's anti-American demonstration in Egypt and the attack on our consulate in Benghazi, Libya that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. diplomats. Romney described an earlier statement issued by the U.S. embassy in Cairo as the administration's "first response" to the attack, characterizing the statement as "akin to an apology" for an anti-Muslim film that allegedly sparked the riots and an attempt to "sympathize" 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 Tuesday night. Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus offered the same assessment in a Twitter message: "Obama sympathizes with attackers in Egypt. Sad and pathetic." Other Republicans, however, appeared eager to distance themselves from the Romney line of attack.

"I don't think President Obama sympathizes with those who attacked us. I don't think any American does," said former Pennsylvania Gov. [Tom Ridge](#), who served as the first Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the George W. Bush administration. Mark Salter, a former chief of staff and campaign aide to Arizona Senator and 2008 Republican presidential candidate John McCain, called the criticism of Obama "as tortured in its reasoning as it is unseemly in its timing." *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan, a speechwriter for President Reagan and the first President Bush, voiced her concern in an [interview](#) on Fox News.

"I always think discretion is the better way to go," Noonan said. "When you step forward in the midst of a political environment and start giving statements on something dramatic and violent that has happened, you're always leaving yourself open to accusations that you are trying to exploit things politically."

Democrats and other critics accused Romney of doing just that. "It is absolutely inappropriate for Romney to seize on this tragedy for political gain," said Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.) A *Washington Post* [editorial](#) called Romney's charge "a discredit to his campaign."

Romney, who has often criticized Obama as one who "apologizes for America," condemned the statement that was issued by embassy officials around noon on Tuesday, according to media reports, hours before demonstrators in Egypt tore down the American flag and a mob attacked the consulate in Benghazi. It appeared to be an effort to defuse Muslim anger over a film, reportedly made



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in the United States, that depicts Mohammad as a fraud and portrays him having sex and issuing calls for massacres. A trailer for the movie appeared on YouTube, resulting in outrage among Muslims, who regard any depiction of the prophet a religious offense. The statement from the U.S. embassy in Cairo said:

The Embassy of the United States in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims — as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions. Today, the 11th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Americans are honoring our patriots and those who serve our nation as the fitting response to the enemies of democracy. Respect for religious beliefs is a cornerstone of American democracy. We firmly reject the actions by those who abuse the universal right of free speech to hurt the religious beliefs of others.

The Obama administration later said the embassy statement “was not cleared by Washington and does not reflect the views of the United States government,” a statement Romney [disputed](#). “They clearly sent mixed messages to the world,” he said, arguing “the embassy is the administration.” Both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned the attacks, while Obama also found in Romney’s criticism an opportunity to get in a dig at his Republican opponent.

“There’s a broader lesson to be learned here. Gov. Romney seems to have a tendency to shoot first and aim later,” Obama said Wednesday in [interview](#) with CBS News. “As president, one of the things I’ve learned is you can’t do that,” he added. “It’s important for you to make sure that the statements that you make are backed up by the facts and that you’ve thought through the ramifications before you make them.” Asked if he considered Romney’s remarks irresponsible, Obama said: “I’ll let the American people judge that.”

Obama and other Democrats will no doubt provide the American people with a lot of help in making that judgment. They have likely not heard the last of Romney as one who likes to “shoot first and aim later.” In the post-Vietnam era, Republicans have usually been successful in portraying themselves as the party with competence and credibility in foreign affairs, with the toughness and determination to confront and defeat America’s enemies. But in this year’s election, it is the Obama campaign that is boasting of the incumbent’s experience in dealing with global issues, including the successful effort in tracking down and killing Osama bin Laden and a readiness to take military action against known and suspected terrorists.

“My opponent and his running mate are new to foreign policy,” Obama said in his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention in Charlotte, drawing cheers and laughter from the crowd. Perhaps that got under Romney’s skin. No doubt it was meant to. Detouring from the economic message he hopes will win him the White House, the former Massachusetts governor rushed in where he saw an opening on foreign policy and left himself open to a charge of rashness, of being one who shoots from the hip. As a former Romney advisor told *The New Republic*, the campaign [“stepped in it.”](#)

“Sometimes,” Noonan observed, “when really bad things happen, when hot things happen, cool words or no words is the way to go.”

Photo: Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney makes comments on the killing of U.S. embassy officials in Benghazi, Libya, while speaking in

Jacksonville, Fla., Sept. 12, 2012: AP Images



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