



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 8, 2012

Romney: Arms for Syria, More Sanctions on Iran

Mitt Romney is calling for tougher sanctions against Iran and arms for the rebels in Syria in a speech the Republican presidential candidate prepared for delivery at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington Monday, [CBS News](#) reported Monday morning. Romney charges Obama with weakness and “passivity” in Middle East conflicts.



The GOP candidate also knocks the Obama administration for its initial assessment that the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, killing the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans, was inspired by an anti-Muslim video posted on the Internet. The administration has since concluded that attack was planned to coincide with the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and was carried out by terrorists with connections to al-Qaeda.

The attack took place the same day a mob in Egypt invaded the grounds of the U.S. embassy in Cairo and desecrated the U.S. flag and raised a black al-Qaeda banner. Those events have been followed by a series of anti-American demonstrations and attacks on U.S. embassies throughout the region, events Romney is describing as “expressions of a larger struggle that is playing out across the broader Middle East” that call for a change of course in that part of the world.

“Hope is not a strategy,” Romney said, mocking the “hope and change” theme of Barack Obama’s campaign for president in 2008. Yet as the former Massachusetts governor sets out to define differences between himself and the president on foreign policy, an area in which Romney has had little direct experience, the differences appear to be more of tone and emphasis than in distinct policy directions. On Libya, for example, Romney promises to support “the Libyan people’s efforts to forge a lasting government that represents all of them,” while pursuing those who attacked the consulate, a position identical to Obama’s pledge.

While the United States and NATO allies intervened with air strikes to help the Libyan rebels, whose ranks included known al-Qaeda operatives, overthrow the dictatorship of Moammar Gadhafi in Libya, Romney is criticizing the Obama administration for not doing enough to achieve a similar outcome in Syria, where rebel forces have been at war with regime of Bashar al-Assad. The United States has been providing intelligence assistance and other non-lethal aid, but is not, as far as is generally known, directly supplying arms to the rebels.

“In Syria, I will work with our partners to identify and organize those members of the opposition who share our values and ensure they obtain the arms they need to defeat Assad’s tanks, helicopters, and



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fighter jets,” Romney promises in his speech at VMI. He did not say, however, whether the arms would come from the United States or one or more of its “partners.” The *New York Times* has reported that the CIA is already helping allies make sure they are sending arms to fighters who are not terrorists.

Restricting the flow of arms to those who “share our values” could be tricky, however. Al-Qaeda members succeeded in infiltrating the rebel forces who took control in Libya, and Libyan fighters have gone to Syria to join in the fighting there. During the Iraq War, groups in Benghazi with links to al-Qaeda entered Iraq via Syria to attack American troops and to try to overthrow the elected Shiite government in Baghdad. Some analysts fear a similar script is being followed now in the war against the regime in Damascus.

“Given its history during the Iraq War, when Syria served as the channel for Libyans to move through and into Iraq, I’m sure there are some folks there who are likely falling back on old ‘bad habits,’” Paul Hughes, a retired Army colonel and currently chief of staff at the U.S. Institute for Peace, told the [Washington Times](#). Russian President Vladimir Putin, who supports the Assad regime, recently [mocked](#) the United States for allegedly supporting in Syria the same brand of terrorists it is fighting elsewhere in the region. Speaking on Russian television during a visit to London last month, Putin suggested if the United States wants to aid the Syrian rebels, it “should unlock Guantanamo, arm all of its inmates and bring them to Syria to do the fighting.”

Ironically, the overthrow of the Assad regime is a goal shared by the United States and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who, according to an audio recording posted on the Internet on September 13, has called on all Muslims to back the rebels in Syria, saying the overthrow of Assad would bring them closer to the ultimate goal of defeating Israel. Romney, who claims a longstanding friendship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is a strong supporter of Israel and has often criticized President Obama for weakness in his support for the Jewish state.

Concerning Iran, and its nuclear program, Romney’s statements prepared for delivery at VMI include the following:

I will not hesitate to impose new sanctions on Iran, and will tighten the sanctions we currently have. I will restore the permanent presence of aircraft carrier task forces in both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf region — and work with Israel to increase our military assistance and coordination.

The sanctions already imposed on Iran have been called among the most severe ever imposed on any nation and are said to be at least partially responsible for the recent drop of almost 40 percent in the value of Iranian currency. The sanctions are also having “significant” harmful effects on the Iranian people, according to United Nations chief Ban Ki-Moon. The United States has also engaged in cyber attacks against Iran’s nuclear infrastructure.

Yet U.S. intelligence agencies and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta have repeatedly said there is yet no evidence that the Iranian government has made the decision to pursue a nuclear weapon. The Tehran regime has insisted that its nuclear development is for peaceful purposes, including energy production and the making of medical isotopes. The debate between Romney and Obama on Iran appears to be whether the United State must commit itself to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb or preventing Tehran from achieving the “capability” of developing an atomic weapon. In a recent television interview, the *New York Times* [noted](#), Romney appeared to be in agreement with Obama, saying the goal is to stop Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon. But in his VMI speech Romney returned



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to his promise to “prevent them from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.”

While President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu have pledged to take whatever steps are necessary, including military action, to prevent the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates [warned](#) last week:

The results of an American or Israeli military strike on Iran could, in my view, prove catastrophic, haunting us for generations in that part of the world.

Gates, who served as defense secretary during part of both the Bush and Obama administrations, said in the same speech: “Neither the United States nor Israel is capable of wiping out Iran’s nuclear capability.” Justin Raimondo, editor of [Antiwar.com](#) [noted](#):

Of course the key word here is capability: short of murdering every Iranian nuclear scientist, and/or occupying the country, eliminating all means for Iran to possibly create a nuclear weapon has always been out of the question.

Raimondo’s observation might appear to be a statement of the obvious. But sometimes something obvious is the easiest thing to overlook.

Photo of Bashar Assad (right) and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: AP Images



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