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Fyi.

From: The Cable [mailto:thecable@foreignpolicy.com]
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Romney to compare Benghazi to original 9/11 attacks

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In a speech Monday, former Governor **Mitt Romney** will criticize President **Barack Obama's** handling of the Sept. 11, 2012, attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi and say it was probably the work of al Qaeda, the same group that brought down the World Trade Center and struck the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

"The attacks on America last month should not be seen as random acts. They are expressions of a larger struggle that is playing out across the broader Middle East -- a region that is now in the midst of the most profound upheaval in a century. And the fault lines of this struggle can be seen clearly in Benghazi itself," Romney will say in a foreign-policy-focused address at the Virginia Military Institute, according to excerpts released by his campaign.

"The attack on our consulate in Benghazi on Sept. 11th, 2012, was likely the work of the same forces that attacked our homeland on Sept. 11th, 2001. This latest assault cannot be blamed on a reprehensible video insulting Islam, despite the administration's attempts to convince us of that for so long. No, as the administration has finally conceded, these attacks were the deliberate work of terrorists who use violence to impose their dark ideology on

others, especially women and girls; who are fighting to control much of the Middle East today; and who seek to wage perpetual war on the West."

Some in the U.S. intelligence community believe that the attack on the Benghazi consulate that killed Amb. **Chris Stevens** and three other Americans was led by the Benghazi chapter of Ansar al-Sharia, an extremist group thought to have ties to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM), al Qaeda's North Africa affiliate.

Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton suggested that groups** with links to AQIM were responsible for the Benghazi attack in remarks at a U.N. meeting on Sept. 26, but State Department and White House spokespersons have repeated again and again that the precise identity of the attackers remains unknown pending an FBI investigation.

Romney will invoke the original 9/11 attacks as part of his argument that Obama has failed to respond to the rapid changes in the Middle East with a proactive and coherent strategy to preserve American power and influence in the region.

"I know the president hopes for a safer, freer, and a more prosperous Middle East allied with the United States. I share this hope. But hope is not a strategy," Romney will say. "We cannot support our friends and defeat our enemies in the Middle East when our words are not backed up by deeds, when our defense spending is being arbitrarily and deeply cut, when we have no trade agenda to speak of, and the perception of our strategy is not one of partnership, but of passivity.... It is time to change course in the Middle East."

Romney will promise to increase and tighten sanctions against Iran, permanently base one aircraft carrier group each in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf, condition aid to Egypt, and "recommit America to the goal of a democratic, prosperous Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with the Jewish state of Israel."

On Syria, Romney will promise to identify opposition groups that share American values and make sure they get weapons to defeat the Syrian regime's tanks, helicopters, and fighter jets. He won't say that the United States should arm the rebels directly -- only that it should make sure they get advanced weaponry.

On Afghanistan, Romney will accuse Obama of timing the withdrawal of U.S. forces based on political considerations, a reference to the fact that Obama withdrew all 30,000 "surge" forces last month. But Romney will reiterate his call to complete the withdrawal of combat troops by the end of 2014, so long as the conditions on the ground permit and in consultation with the military chain of command.

"I believe that if America does not lead, others will -- others who do not share our interests and our values -- and the world will grow darker, for our friends and for us. America's security and the cause of freedom cannot afford four more years like the last four years," Romney will say. "The 21st century can and must be an American century. It began with terror, war, and economic calamity. It is our duty to steer it onto the path of freedom, peace, and prosperity."

The Romney campaign held a conference call for reporters Sunday to preview the speech, which included participation by campaign foreign-policy coordinator **Alex Wong** and senior advisors **Rich Williamson** and **Eliot Cohen**.

Wong said that Obama has stepped away from American leadership and undermined the basis of American power. He also said the standing of the United States has been weakened in every region of the world, and likened Obama's foreign policy to that of former President **Jimmy Carter**.

Williamson said that Obama has a policy of weakness that is provocative to enemies and that his administration hasn't been transparent on the Benghazi attacks.

"The foreign policy of Barack Obama in the Middle East is a mess and is failing, and that should be a part of the discussion," Williamson said.

The Obama campaign preemptively released a statement calling Romney a neophyte and flip-flopper on foreign policy who has fumbled his forays into foreign-policy issues throughout the campaign.

"If Mitt Romney wants to have a debate about foreign policy, we have a message for him: bring it on... To date, all Mitt Romney has offered is bluster and platitudes. He's erratically shifted positions on every major foreign policy issue, including intervening in Libya, which he was against before he was for," Obama for America spokeswoman **Liz Smith** said in the statement.

"'Mainstream' foreign policy isn't what Mitt Romney is putting forward: having plans to start wars but not end them; wanting to keep 30,000 U.S. troops in Iraq indefinitely; exploding our defense spending to levels the Pentagon has not asked for, with no way to pay for it; insulting our allies and partners around the world on the campaign trail; and calling Russia our number-one geopolitical foe. If that's where Mitt Romney thinks the mainstream is, he needs to find a better compass. It's clear that on every measure, Mitt Romney fails the commander-in-chief test."

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