

# Local policy experts differ on responses to Mideast attacks

By Peg Quann Staff writer | Posted: Thursday, September 13, 2012 5:45 am

Local experts in international affairs and political science say the killing of the U.S. ambassador to Libya on the Sept. 11 anniversary shows that terrorism against the United States continues and will become a focal point in the presidential election.

"Al-Qaida has a significant amount of strength in Libya," said Wojtek Wolfe, a professor of political science at Rutgers University in Camden and a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

Wolfe noted that the terrorist organization's flag was flown in the Libyan capital of Tripoli two days after the government there fell last year.

"Al-Qaida has significant freedom of movement there," he said. "They have more freedom of movement than in a more stable country."

"It's a risky situation in Libya, Egypt and Syria," Wolfe added. "Any time you have political instability and violence, it gives terrorist organizations an advantage to act. I don't know if the U.S. can do anything."

Wolfe said the situation in the Mideast is complicated by the tension between Iran and Israel over Iran's nuclear expansion.

"I think there's definitely room for a diplomatic resolution," he said.

Edward Turzanski, a Templeton fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and a history and political science professor at La Salle University, commented on the political implications of the attack and a volatile Egyptian protest earlier Tuesday at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo in which the American flag was torn down.

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney criticized the Obama administration for its response to the attacks, saying, "They clearly sent mixed messages to the world."

"These attacks ostensibly happened as a result of a video ... of the Prophet Mohammed circulating on YouTube. The State Department did not initially condemn the attack on our (Cairo) embassy but condemned the people who did the video. Romney ... thought it was a terrible judgment," Turzanski said.

The State Department "sent a very muddy message" that created "moral confusion," he said.

"This administration has a record of offering apologies for slights and insults by the U.S., real and imagined. He (Romney) was particularly outraged that the U.S. government response was embarrassing beyond belief."

But Dan Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in Galloway, Atlantic County, said Romney was wrong in attacking the administration's handling of the situation while it was still so volatile and all the facts were unknown.

"In most presidential campaigns, there's been some respect that there's only one president at a time as it relates to foreign policy. I think he (Romney) should have waited to get all the facts, to have an appropriate time to offer his criticism," Douglas said. "The president should really have some freedom to be the commander in chief. At a later time, criticize his action. ... We may not know the whole story yet."

"As things are developing is probably not the best time to criticize the president," he said.