

# Obama's Political Weapon

## Bin Laden Killing Becomes Campaign Tool

**BEN FELLER**

AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON — The killing of Osama bin Laden, first presented as a moment of national unity by President Barack Obama, has become something else: a political weapon.

Obama's re-election campaign is portraying his risky decision to go after America's top enemy as a defining difference with his Republican presidential opponent, suggesting Mitt Romney might not have had the guts to order a mission that put lives and perhaps a presidency at stake.

Obama himself is opening up on the raid again — and opening the secretive White House Situation Room as an interview stage — to hail the one-year anniversary.

The broader goal for Obama, whether through campaign web videos or the trappings of the White House, is not to just to remind voters of an enormous victory on his watch. It is to maximize a political narrative that he has the courage to make tough calls that his opponent might not.

"Does anybody doubt that had the mission failed, it would have written the beginning of the end of the president's first term?" Vice President Joe Biden says in laying out Obama's foreign policy campaign message. "We know what President Obama did. We can't say for certain what Governor Romney would have done."

The strategy underscores the fact that the Obama who ordered the raid as commander in chief is now seeking a second term as president. The risk is the political blowback that can come if he is seen as crossing a line into politicizing national security.

"Sad," said a Romney spokeswoman. "Shameless," said 2008 Obama election foe John McCain.

Biden even combined the killing of the al-Qaida leader and Obama's support for a failing auto industry into what he called a re-election bumper sticker message.

"It's pretty simple: Osama bin Laden is dead and General Motors is alive," the vice president said in a speech on Thursday.

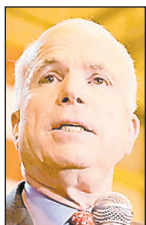
Obama's campaign followed that Friday with a new web video questioning whether Romney would have taken the same path Obama did. If features a quote from a 2007 Romney interview in which he said it was not worth "moving heaven and earth spending billions of dollars just trying to catch one person."

That prompted Obama's 2008 opponent, Arizona's McCain, to issue a scathing statement in which he accused Obama of playing politics with the bin Laden killing and "diminishing the memory of September 11th."

"This is the same president who said, after bin Laden was dead, that we shouldn't 'spike the ball' after the touchdown," he said. "And now Barack Obama is not only trying to score political points by invoking Osama bin Laden, he is doing a shameless end-zone dance to help himself get re-elected."



**Biden**



**McCain**

The president's initial words on the bin Laden mission — a raid for which he received wide praise, including from Romney — were ones of sober thanks. Addressing the nation late that night of May 1, 2011, in Washington, Obama said: "Tonight, let us think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11."

So much for that, the Romney campaign said Friday.

"It's now sad to see the Obama campaign seek to use an event that unified our country to once again divide us, in order to distract voters' attention from the failures of his administration," Romney spokeswoman Andrea Saul said.

Obama campaign spokesman Ben LaBolt declined comment for this story, saying Biden's speech and the new campaign video speak for themselves.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the bin Laden raid is a part of Obama's foreign policy story, and "I think the way that we've handled it represents exactly the balance you need to strike."

President George W. Bush, when seeking re-election in 2004, faced criticism that he was politicizing the memory of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, including with a video at the Republican National Convention that credited him with "the heart of a president."

Steve Schmidt, a spokesman and strategist for that Bush campaign, said the bin Laden killing is fair game as a campaign message for Obama.

"It was a courageous political decision to launch the raid where bin Laden was killed. The stakes were enormous," Schmidt said. "Had it gone south, there would have been tremendous political ramifications for the president. It's a real event that happened on his watch, by his command."

In perspective, Schmidt added, the issue won't be a determining factor in an election to be driven by the economy.

Bin Laden was killed in Pakistan by U.S. Navy SEALs. The terror leader was living in a compound in one of Islamabad's suburbs, having evaded capture for nearly 10 years.

The episode is featured prominently in a longer Obama campaign video, narrated by actor Tom Hanks, as an example of decisive leadership.

Obama sent in the U.S. forces with no assurance that bin Laden was at the site, leading to a heart-pounding scene in the Situation Room, captured in one of the most famous photos of Obama's presidency.

From that room, Obama will relive the moment in prime time. The White House granted NBC News' Brian Williams access to the Situation Room, and interviews with Obama and top members of his security team, for a special that has been taped and will air on Wednesday.

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**JOE BIDEN**

### Syria Suicide Bombing Kills 10

BEIRUT (AP) — Two weeks into a cease-fire agreement, there still was no peace in Syria: Security agents in Damascus collected the remains of 10 people killed in a suicide bombing. Activists reported troops firing on protesters. Video showed a crowd carrying a slain boy to U.N. observers as proof of regime violence.

The head of the United Nations said Syrian President Bashar Assad's continued crackdown on protests has reached an "intolerable stage," and that the U.N. will try to speed up the deployment of up to 300 monitors to Syria. Only 15 are there now.

"The government of Syria must live up to its promises to the world," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Friday.

Tens of thousands of people poured into the streets across Syria for weekly anti-regime marches after Muslim noon prayers Friday. Amateur video from the central city of Homs, where the presence of U.N. observers helped halt weeks of artillery attacks, showed rows of men lining up in a main street, holding each other by the shoulders as they sang and danced.

In another protest, people held up 45 squares of cardboard with writing and drawings that — when viewed together from above — showed a picture of Assad and the words "oppression, corruption, despotism, demolition." When they simultaneously flipped over the squares, it created a new message that read: "Toward a modern society that is more developed and sensible."

## Congratulations Bette Keiser 2012 Hazel Hani Award Winner

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## Romney Urges Young People To Take More Economic Risks

**BY STEVE PEOPLES**

Associated Press

WESTERVILLE, Ohio — Mitt Romney on Friday encouraged young Americans facing bleak job prospects to "take risks" — and even borrow money from their parents — to help improve their economic fortunes.

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee noted that the nation's economy is recovering but blamed President Barack Obama for presiding over the "most anemic and tepid" comeback since the Great Depression. Continuing his recent focus on younger voters, Romney said Obama's policies are making it harder for college graduates to be successful.

"This kind of decisiveness, this attack of success is very different than what we've seen in our country's history," Romney told students and supporters gathered at Otterbein University in central Ohio. "We've always encouraged young people — take a shot, go for it, take a risk and get the education, borrow money if you have to from your parents, start a business."

Romney then shared the story of sandwich magnate Jimmy John, who Romney said borrowed \$20,000 from his parents to launch his first sandwich shop.

"This is kind of an American experience," he said of John's story.

Romney's call for "economic freedom" was a familiar theme for the former Massachusetts governor, who faced the public for the first time since declaring himself the Republican presidential nominee-in-waiting earlier in the week. But some Democrats said his suggestion that young people borrow thousands of dollars from their parents shows that he's out of touch with ordinary Americans.

"Only someone who paid for college by selling stock given to him by his CEO father would just casually assume students could go borrow \$20,000 from their par-



**Romney**

ents to deal with the economic challenges they face," said Joshua Dorner, a spokesman for the Center for American Progress Action Fund.

In an interview with the *Boston Globe* in 1994, Ann Romney said her husband sold off stock that his father had bought for him so that they had money to live on as married college students.

Romney's comments came the same day the Commerce Department reported that the nation's recovery may be slowing, although he ignored the news while speaking at Otterbein University.

"The president is going to want to take credit for the economy getting better, and I am convinced it will get better. Every recession ends. Every recession ultimately becomes a recovery," he said.

Romney added: "This just happens to be the most anemic and tepid recovery we've seen since Hoover."

President Herbert Hoover was in office when the stock market crashed in October 1929 and, as the nation struggled amid an economic depression, lost re-election to Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932.

The Commerce Department estimated that the economy grew at 2.2 percent over the first three months of the year. That's compared to 3 percent growth in the previous three months.

Romney offered a more measured tone than he had in the final weeks of the competitive phase of the GOP primary season. He did not mention Obama by name in a speech that spanned more than 40 minutes, although he condemned the president's policies that target the wealthy.

"I will try and unite the American people, not divide us," he said.

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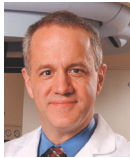
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