

Mitt Romney's Short Strange Trip

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Posted: 08/03/2012 11:26 am

Mitt Romney recently traveled abroad to try to demonstrate his foreign policy credentials, because we all know a few staged meetings with leaders of key U.S. allies is enough preparation to serve as president. Romney, however, was unable to pass even this extraordinarily easy test. Instead, his foreign trip served to reinforce what many people already believe about him -- that despite some strengths, he is an extremely bad candidate. This trip will be remembered more for Romney's [insulting comments about the London Olympics](#) and the [quick and profane temper](#) of his aid, Rick Gorka than for anything Romney did to demonstrate statesmanship or even an understanding of the world outside the U.S.

The trip also managed to undermine one of Romney's supposed credentials, his handling of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Now, Romney will be unable to take credit for those Olympics without voters being reminded of how he insulted the British, our closest allies, on the eve of these Olympics. On balance, it is apparent that Romney's campaign would have been much better served if the candidate had spent the last week of July shaking hands in a mall in Ohio or some other swing state, rather than traveling abroad.

Romney's trip abroad, in addition to being a political misstep for the candidate, further demonstrates one of the core weaknesses of Romney's candidacy and to an extent, his general outlook. Romney seems to believe that his success in business, and his knowledge in that area, will translate seamlessly into the complicated tasks associated with being president of the United States, and that the questions of governance, like those of business, lend themselves to clear answers, singularity of goals and similar types of analysis. Unfortunately for Romney, as he may have learned on this trip, this is not the case.

Romney's comments about the London Olympics, for example, were ill-timed and disrespectful, but they also reveal his attitude, garnered from his business success, that Romney, the wise consultant, knows the best approaches and that hard truths need to be told. A better politician, or somebody with a modicum of understanding of foreign policy, would understand that when a steadfast ally and friend of the U.S., or almost any other country, is preparing the host the Olympics, the best thing for the president, or any aspiring president, to do is to say how great the city looks and how excited they are for the games to begin. Romney's inability to navigate that does not fill anybody with confidence that he will do better when faced with real foreign policy challenges, should he ever become president.

To some extent, Romney's candidacy has been grounded in the notion that being president is not all that tough, that it just requires good business experience and sound values and that President Obama is either too cerebral or too anti-American to do the job well. While the Obama campaign has done an excellent job of raising questions about the nature of Romney's record as a job creator, the question of the relevance of his experience in business to the challenges of being

president have not been raised at all, but Romney's conduct on this trip, suggests that they probably should be.

Romney's recent trip should have taught him that being president is not going to be easy and that even a multi-day photo-op to friendly countries is filled with potential missteps. While insulting the British, having staff who are unable to control their emotions, and oversimplifying complex foreign policy questions are relatively minor mistakes, together they demonstrate reasonably clearly that even if being president is not all that difficult, Romney still isn't ready for the job. More realistically, perhaps Romney understands that for a president, or a presidential candidate, even the easy-seeming tasks can be tough.

While Romney and the Republicans will still build an argument for their candidate based on persuading voters that Obama has been a failure, they are increasingly not able to convince voters that Romney has the temperament, or even the experience, for the position. This is partially due to the attacks made by the Democrats, but also due to Romney's weakness as a candidate, failure to communicate effectively and inability to have a successful trip abroad under the easiest of circumstances.

Romney, with the exception of a few platitudes, has largely ignored foreign policy during his campaign, possibly because the economy is such a major issue and the campaign, and possibly because he knows so little about it. Romney's weakened foreign policy credentials now are due largely to his own arrogance. It is easy to see the former consultant thinking that a quick trip to see a few allies would be a sure way to make Americans think Romney knew a few things about foreign policy. Unfortunately, it is just as easy to see that same approach leading Romney to rush into rash foreign policy decisions because he thinks it is all easy easy, which, we know, it never is.