

THE LIBYA QUESTION

I think I'm nearly alone on the left in believing the Libya question in last night's debate was not a total win for President Obama. I think he could have been even stronger than he was in his own answer, where he talked about how seriously he takes the death of Ambassador Chris Stevens and others. After all, Mitt is by his own admission politicizing this, and it would be totally fair for Obama to call him out for dancing on the Ambassador's grave.

I also think Candy Crowley got a moment of false neutral cold feet, when she said it took "about 2 weeks" for the White House to admit the protest was not a response to an anti-Muslim film. According to CNN, the last time Obama raised the video was on September 20.

Well, we're still doing an investigation, and there are going to be different circumstances in different countries. And so I don't want to speak to something until we have all the information. What we do know is that the natural protests that arose because of the outrage over the video were used as an excuse by extremists to see if they can also directly harm U.S. interests –

So Crowley's idea of a fact check here was to fudge by 5 days. And even that was in the context of questions about the protests generally.

Before we start, before talking about education and its future, we would like to talk about something that is happening right now in recent news. As we know, at the present time, 1,000 people are trying to get into the embassy in Pakistan, and we have seen protests, anti-American protests in thousands of countries.

We know in Libya, four Americans were

killed. We know now that Ambassador Chris Stevens warned about security days before he was killed. Many people want to know whether – if you expected so much anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world. And why wasn't your administration better prepared with more security at our embassies on September 11?

Still, this “fact check” from John Dickerson is batshit crazy.

The president's tall tales came during a debate over Libya. The administration's story is changing almost daily about what happened, who knew what when, and who is going to take responsibility for it. The topic presents political peril for the president. He effectively took command, saying that all responsibility rested with him and that he would get to the bottom of who killed the four Americans, including the ambassador. He criticized Romney for using the issue to score political points and took umbrage at the suggestion that anyone in his administration would act politically. Then, he proceeded to act politically. That is, if you define acting politically as suggesting something that isn't true is true for the purpose of saving your job.

Obama said, “The day after the attack, governor, I stood in the Rose Garden and I told the American people ... that this was an act of terror.” Obama was trying to suggest that he had declared this a terrorist attack long before his administration actually did. For days and days afterward, administration officials would not claim it was a terrorist attack. U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice famously refused to call it such on Face the Nation. The president was trying to reset the timeline. **If you**

look at the president's statement in the Rose Garden, he does use that phrase, but it's a throwaway cliché. Indeed, it arguably wasn't about the attack at all, just a bromide about more general acts of terror. In any event, the president buried the lead in the tenth paragraph of his remarks. That's why none of the papers at the time reported that he had characterized any part of the attack as having to do with terrorism. When Romney called him on it, the president wouldn't answer. "Please proceed, governor," he said, as if he were the moderator and not the fellow who was being called out. It was the verbal equivalent of putting your hands over your eyes and pretending no one will see you. [my emphasis and link]

Yes, this fetish with calling things terrorism has become a cliché. But that's the point—the entire reason Mitt's team has staked so much on it. Yet using the word precisely as Mitt is using is somehow invalidates it for Dickerson.

And for a journalist to suggest that it's the President's fault this wasn't reported?

So maybe I am totally wrong about how well the Libya question will serve Obama. If reporters like Dickerson are now blaming the President because they didn't report this well back in September, it must have been an important moment, right?