

Romney trip may not matter much to voters in November

By **Tom Cohen**, CNN

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Washington (CNN) -- Mitt Romney's high-profile trip to England, Israel and Poland featured cheering crowds, iconic settings and forceful speeches, but may be remembered more for diplomatic gaffes.

Whether any of it will matter when American voters choose between Romney and President Barack Obama three months from now is less clear.

The six-day trip to key U.S. allies that ended Tuesday was intended to burnish the foreign policy credentials of the former Massachusetts governor and help him galvanize support from the Republican Party's conservative base.

However, an early stumble when Romney questioned London's readiness for the Olympics, followed by remarks in Israel that angered Palestinians, created [a story line that persisted through the trip](#).

Political analysts said the Romney trip's impact on voters would likely be negligible, though the gaffes prevented him from getting all the benefit he sought.

"The good news for him is that Americans care about economic issues," said Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington. "From that standpoint, burnishing his foreign policy credentials doesn't matter much."

Polls showed Americans favored Obama over Romney on foreign policy issues before the trip, and that won't change because of anything that happened overseas, Bandow told CNN on Tuesday.

Wendy Schiller, a political science professor at Brown University, said a mistake or two by Romney won't undermine his campaign but could raise doubts about his readiness to replace Obama in the minds of some swing voters.

"If they contribute to a nagging perception that something is not right or different, then it can hurt you in November," Schiller told CNN.

A major question was whether Americans were paying attention. [Omekongo Dibinga](#), a rap artist and motivational speaker, said his friends were focused on the Olympics rather than the Romney trip.

"Nobody's talking about this in my circle," said Dibinga, a frequent contributor to CNN iReports.

As Romney headed home from Poland on Tuesday, the Obama campaign skewered his trip as a failure and a waste of valuable campaign time. Romney failed to clearly assert his foreign policy positions and instead limited many of his stops to brief photo opportunities with foreign leaders, argued senior Obama campaign adviser Robert Gibbs.

"Every day that you run as a challenger to an incumbent president, you are auditioning for the role of president of the United States and internationally as commander in chief," Gibbs said. "It is clear that the opportunity to credential his beliefs with American voters was nothing short for Mitt Romney of an embarrassing disaster on this trip."

A top Romney adviser rejected such criticism.

"I think it was a great success," Stuart Stevens told reporters after Romney [gave a speech Tuesday in Warsaw](#). "The idea is that, can people get a good sense of who he is? Can people listen and see that this is a person speaking from the heart about Israel and about Poland? And he is."

Romney's troubles [began on his first day in London](#) when he told NBC that some Olympic security and labor issues were "disconcerting."

[Prime Minister David Cameron](#) later noted that organizing the Olympics in a world capital was much more difficult than in the "middle of nowhere," a clear

shot at the Salt Lake City Games headed by Romney, while London tabloids went on the attack with one headline reading "Mitt the Twit."

"This isn't high-level diplomacy; it's basic manners 101," Schiller said. "You don't insult your host, and that's what he did."

In Israel, Romney delivered a major foreign policy speech aligning himself rigidly with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but outraged Palestinians leaders by calling Jerusalem the undisputed capital and later saying the economic disparity between Israelis and Palestinians was due in part to "culture."

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat [called Romney's culture statement racist](#), a charge that Romney denied Tuesday in an interview with Fox News. Insisting his comments were not specifically about the Palestinian culture, Romney said that "the choices a society makes have a profound impact on the economy and the vitality of that society."

Stevens, the Romney campaign official, said the magnitude of the November election would overshadow any temporary focus on criticism of Romney during the trip.

"This has not been a race that's been affected by small things at all," he said. "And I think it means absolutely nothing to people at home because it has no relevance to their life. It doesn't matter."

The Cato Institute's Bandow agreed, saying that Romney's blunders, while embarrassing, "don't really hurt him."

For example, the trip to Israel was "a play for the Jewish vote," so insulting Palestinians caused no harm, Bandow said.

"This doesn't matter much that he said a stupid thing, which he did," Bandow continued, adding that the controversy with the Palestinians "probably detracted

a bit, but in terms of which group matters more -- Arab Americans or Jewish Americans -- [the answer is Jewish Americans.](#)"

Schiller of Brown University said that Obama's strong support from Jewish voters in 2008 would be replicated this year, regardless of whether Romney visited Jerusalem.

"There's always a maximum of maybe 25-30 percent of Jews who really vote Republican," she said.

As to whether Romney's insult of Palestinians might hurt him in November in Michigan, which has large Muslim populations in some areas, Schiller said it didn't matter because, she predicted, Obama will win the state anyway.