

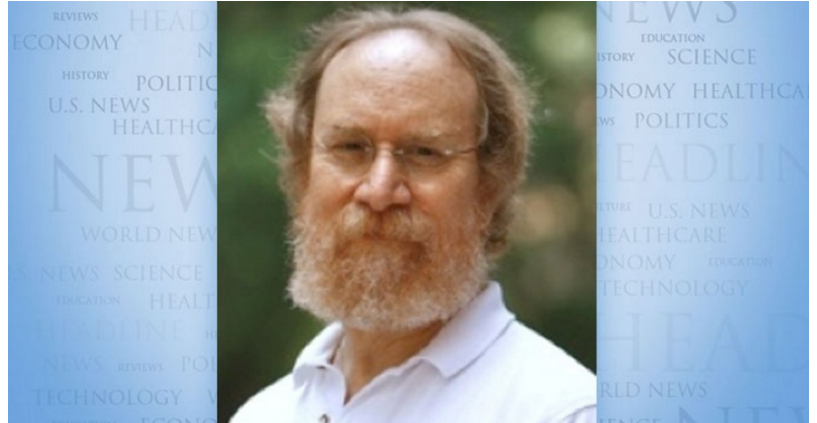


Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on September 27, 2012

The Hubris of Romney and Obama

Mitt Romney, whose bid to unseat Barack Obama looks more desperate every day, senses he's found a weakness in his rival. In a foreign-policy speech the other day, he blasted Obama over the upheaval in the Arab world, saying, "This is a time for a president who will shape events in the Middle East."

Romney is making two claims: that Obama has failed to shape events in the Middle East and that he, Romney, will succeed.



Could the hubris of a man seeking power be plainer? Does anyone with even a minimum ability to think clearly believe that Romney could "shape events" there?

We have many reasons to distrust power. One is that it inevitably violates individual rights through the legalized use of aggressive force against peaceful people. The naked power of tyrants is obvious; but the governments of democratic republics also aggress against their subjects, for example, when they tax them to provide subsidies and bailouts and launch offensive wars

It is no surprise that power attracts the sort of unsavory people who see themselves as qualified to wield it. In a different context Adam Smith wrote that power "would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it."

"Folly and presumption" seem apt words for anyone who proclaims that he can shape events — that is, people's lives — in the Middle East.

Romney is not the only presidential contender displaying folly and presumption. Obama (along with his secretary of State, Hillary Clinton) apparently has no trouble believing that he too can control events in the Arab and Muslim world. There's no other way to explain the unwise things he's done.

The irony is that the current turmoil in the Middle East is the result of decades of U.S. government (and before that, British) attempts to manage that part of the world — attempts that continue to this present moment.

No one should be surprised at the lethal assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11. When the Obama administration decided last year to back the resistance to (former U.S. ally) Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, critics warned that no one could be sure of what the rebels' post-Qadaffi intentions were or that the arms provided by the U.S. government would not end up in the "wrong hands." It was widely reported that elements of al-Qaeda were members of the U.S.-backed resistance. Obama ignored the warnings (while killing a Libyan al-Qaeda leader in a drone strike in Pakistan), and on September 11 heavily armed rebel forces attacked the consulate and safe house, killing the ambassador and three other U.S. personnel.

In Egypt a violent demonstration took place at the U.S. embassy, aggravating concerns over the country's new president, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is no fan of the U.S. government. Did this animosity come out of the blue? Of course not. U.S. presidents backed brutal Egyptian dictators for decades. When the popular uprising against the last one, Hosni Mubarak, occurred, the Obama



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administration initially voiced support for him. Clinton called him a family friend. Only when his ouster was inevitable did Obama abandon him — throwing U.S. support to his torturer-in-chief as his successor.

Under such circumstances, did anyone expect the Egyptians and President Mohamed Morsi to feel friendly toward the U.S. government?

U.S. attempts to manage the Middle East did not start last year. The intervention has been continuous, from the backing of the establishment of Israel in 1948 over the objection of the indigenous Palestinians, to the CIA-run overthrow of a democratically elected secular prime minister in Iran in 1953, to the support of a 1968 coup in Iraq that eventually led to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, to the continuing support for oppressive monarchies in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, and elsewhere.

The “folly and presumption” of Romney and Obama disqualify them both for office. And now the Obama administration is intervening in Syria, as it did in Libya, on the side of rebels, including members of al-Qaeda, who are trying to bring down dictator Bashar al-Assad. Will anyone be surprised when heavily armed forces attack the U.S. embassy in Damascus after Assad is gone?

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