



## Hubris is not a strategy, either

By: Gene Healy - October 8, 2012

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In the 2008 GOP race, the hawkish New York mayor served as a foil for peace candidate Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas. Paul consistently outpolled Giuliani, but it's Rudy's rhetoric that lives on in today's Romney campaign. As The Examiner's Philip Klein cracked Monday, "that Romney speech was not aimed at Ron Paul voters."

In his speech at the Virginia Military Institute, Romney called for a new approach to the Middle East, based on "these bedrock principles: America must have confidence in our cause, clarity in our purpose and resolve in our might." Those are attitudes, not principles. And if jut-jawed self-assurance that we know what we're doing in the Middle East was the key to victory, we'd have a little more to show from the last 11 years of war. Hope is not a strategy, but hubris isn't either.

At VMI, Romney criticized President Obama's "pivot to Asia" as a sign we're neglecting our allies elsewhere. Romney's not against pivoting toward Asia per se, since "China's recent assertiveness is sending chills through the region." But also he wants us to refocus on Europe, brush back Putin, arm the Syrian rebels and get tougher with Iran. A Romney administration will pivot like a dervish, directing American force and authority everywhere at once. At a press conference the morning of the speech, his top foreign policy aides even refused to rule out boots on the ground in Libya.

"It is the responsibility of our president to use America's great power to shape history," Romney told the VMI cadets. Actually, the president's responsibility, per his oath of office in Article II, Section 1, is to "preserve, protect, and defend" the U.S. Constitution.

That document says nothing about using the U.S. military to bend the arc of history. When it comes to foreign policy, the Constitution has humbler goals. As the Preamble explains, the federal government was established to "provide for the common defence" of the United States and "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

Today, as my colleague Ben Friedman points out, "The United States does not have a defense budget. The adjective is wrong." Our bloated military budget and our overextended force posture have "little to do with the requirements of protecting Americans."

In last week's debate, Romney argued that "the amount of debt we're adding, at a trillion a year, is simply not moral." Yesterday he insisted that we must show the world that "we

have the will and the wisdom to ... roll back our unsustainable debt [and] to reverse the catastrophic cuts now threatening our national defense." But when the governor complains about debt and -- in the same sentence -- declares 20 percent of the federal budget off limits, you have to wonder how morally serious he is.

In a speech last year, departing Defense Secretary Robert Gates worried about indiscriminate cuts to the Pentagon's budget, then approaching some \$700 billion a year. "A smaller military," he warned, "will be able to go fewer places and be able to do fewer things." One can be forgiven the heretical thought that the last decade would have gone better with a U.S. military that went "fewer places" and did "fewer things."

Some of Mitt Romney's supporters argue that he's too smart to believe his own bellicose rhetoric. They hope that if elected, he'll shake the Etch a Sketch again and pivot toward realism and restraint. So who says hope isn't a strategy?

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