



After 11 Years, Cause of 9/11 Still Up for Debate

By Chris Stirewalt

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"The way these perpetrators acted and moved -- I think we, and they're choosing the specific date for this so-called demonstration, I think we have no, this leaves us with no doubt that this was pre-planned, determined."

-- *Libyan President **Muhammad Yousef El-Magariaf** on "Face the Nation" discussing the deadly attacks on U.S. consulate in the Libyan city of Benghazi.*

"The information, the best information and the best assessment we have today is that in fact this was not a preplanned, premeditated attack. That what happened initially was that it was a spontaneous reaction to what had just transpired in Cairo as a consequence of the video."

-- ***Susan Rice**, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, on "FOX News Sunday with Chris Wallace" talking about about the wave of anti-American violence and riots across the Muslim world.*

This is a very bad time to be an American in a Muslim country. Though the wave of rage that swept through Islamic nations for nearly a week seems to have ebbed a bit, there are still protests from Indonesia to Tunisia.

The popular unrest has been coupled with a new wave of killings of American forces in Afghanistan.

But why?

In the telling of the Obama administration and the American left, the cause was a crudely made movie, or excerpts from a crudely made movie, mocking the founder of Islam, Muhammad. The video went viral and turned the otherwise positive popular uprising of the region into an anti-American rage.

In the telling of Republican nominee Mitt Romney and the American right, the cause is the ongoing radicalization of Islam and the clerics who, as the anniversary of Sept. 11 was approaching, were looking for anything to incite their followers. If it hadn't been for that movie, it would have something else.

This is the same rift that dominated the national discussion after the attacks of 11 years ago. How much culpability did American policy and culture play in precipitating the attacks?

The left said that the attacks should make Americans more sensitive to the concerns of the billion Muslims of the world. The right said that Americans, still mourning the lives of nearly 3,000 of their countrymen, had nothing to apologize for and that it was Muslim culture that needed to reform.

This devolved into accusations from the left that conservatives were being jingoistic and intolerant and from the right that liberals were blaming America first and appeasing aggressors.

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In 1856, a massive revolt began among Indian troops serving the British East India Company, ostensibly over the use of new rifle cartridges greased with animal fat. Since the troops had to tear open the cartridges with their teeth, Hindus said that whatever molecules of tallow were passing their lips was a violation of the religious law forbidding the consumption of meat.

The troops revolted and joined a popular uprising that led to a two-year long rebellion and counter-rebellion that ended with the British tightening their grip on the colony, in an authoritarian rule that would last for nearly a century.

Was the so-called Sepoy Mutiny an unavoidable manifestation of a clash of civilizations or the result of an unhappy coincidence involving local grievances and British arms technology?

Historians haven't quite figured that one out, so it's safe to assume that the causes and proper responses to the anti-American sentiment that grips the Muslim world will not be any more easily resolved.

But, for the purposes of the election 50 days hence, the debate will be significant, especially if gasoline prices stay high and American outposts remain under siege.

While Obama's view may win plaudits from foreign policy hands and many in the press, Romney's is more politically potent.

Romney's accusation of appeasement and declaration that the cause of the problems are a corroded culture, not a YouTube video, per se, will sit better with voters than the internationalist nuance offered by the president.

The Knives Come Out in Boston

"Politics is like sports. A lot of people have ideas, and there's no right or wrong. You just have to chart a course, and stay on that course."

-- *Stuart Stevens*, senior adviser to Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, talking to Politico for an article that lays the blame for recent struggles by the campaign at Stevens' feet.

Republican doomsayers got fresh evidence today of infighting and confusion inside the Romney campaign in a Politico piece that lays the blame for recent troubles in the campaign at the feet of senior strategist Stuart Stevens.

The article cites unnamed Romney insiders who say that Stevens' unconventional style and eccentric personality have destabilized the campaign. The sources juxtapose Stevens' mercurial management with the disciplined approach of the veterans of the two Bush campaigns who joined the effort after Romney clinched the Republican nomination.

It's very rough stuff and will probably provoke a blind-quote counterattack in the days to come.

If Romney really is losing ground, this sort of backstabbing will only intensify. Not only does this kind of misbehavior help apportion blame but also could represent an early effort at a coup.

If Romney starts gaining ground, these kinds of pieces will fade and, except for the hard feelings left over between partisan operatives, not matter much.

But the question of how the campaign got to this pass is worth exploring now.

In discussions with Romney team members over several months, it became clear to Power Play that the slimmed-down Romney operation that persisted after the former Massachusetts governor lost his 2008 bid was a closed shop.

Romney's victory in 2012 seemed to vindicate the Boston loyalists who blamed Bush-laced operatives from Washington for the defeat. And then, when the time came to open the doors to staff up and expand the operations, old suspicions were too tough to overcome.

John McCain's campaign was plagued with this kind of infighting and rivalry, partly encouraged by a candidate who encouraged the competition and frequently changed course. It played to his maverick brand but led to confusion.

Romney's primary selling point as a presidential candidate is his skill as a manager, which makes campaign dysfunction more dangerous, especially given the media appetite for stories that reinforce a narrative of Romney incompetence.

But now is not a good time for Romney to step in and become CEO of his campaign. He is the product that his campaign is selling and can ill-afford to distract himself from campaigning, raising money and preparing for the debates. Where Romney might have once been able to be the boss in Boston, he's not able to do that now.

Romney could, however, designate someone from inside the campaign as the chief operating officer in his absence and empower that person to impose order.

Whether Team Romney can suck it up and play hard for the next seven weeks will have a lot to do with ultimate success or failure.

Obama, Rahm Have Competing Interests in Chicago Strike

"I will not stand by while the children of Chicago are played as pawns in an internal dispute within a union."

-- *Statement from Chicago Mayor **Rahm Emanuel** raising the possibility of a federal lawsuit to force the city's teachers' union to abandon a strike now in its second week.*

In his time as White House chief of staff and as part of the House Democratic leadership, Rahm Emanuel was a constant voice for Clinton-style moderation.

As the mayor of Chicago, Emanuel is looking to reinforce that brand through an ongoing labor dispute with some 30,000 striking teachers, administrators and support staff. He wants some new accountability measures in the district's new contract and new authority to fire failing teachers and close unneeded schools.

Even though the changes are modest compared to what some other districts have done, they are anathema in the deeply Democratic, pro-union world of Chicago. With a still-supportive public, the union is now in a second week of striking, leaving hundreds of thousands of parents in a bind.

Emanuel, whose ambitions know no limit, is not interested in being seen as caving in to big labor in this high-profile strike. Whatever his future holds, he wants to be seen as willing to stand up to the labor left.

What his former boss President Obama needs, though, is a speedy resolution to his hometown labor dispute. Obama does not want to have to speak out against the government worker unions who are the most important part of his political base. But neither does he want to have to seem cowed by his labor patrons on the issue of school reform.

Emanuel reportedly was never accepted by the loyalists in Obamaland and was held in suspicion for his Clinton ties and more moderate approach. If the strike continues much longer, those tensions will surely deepen.

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