

Christie in the Crosshairs


by **G. Murphy Donovan** (February 2014)

“My father was a statesman, I'm a political woman. My father was a saint. I'm not.”

– *Indira Gandhi*

The 2016 US Presidential Campaign is underway. Not underway officially of course, but interest groups and pundits are already taking sides and stirring the political pot. Presumptive front runners seem to be former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for the Democrats and New Jersey governor Chris Christie for the Republicans. There are no third party spoilers on the horizon for the moment.

Two Media themes are evident to date; the [lionizing](#) of Hillary as a seasoned statesman and the demonization of Christy as a loud, rude, [thug](#) from New Jersey. Mitt Romney was portrayed as the insensitive, rich, business mogul in the 2012 campaign with effect. Seems Romney was way too genteel to win a Chicago street fight.

 Hillary has few significant policy or program accomplishments to her credit. Her time at the Senate and the State Department seem to have been a kind of resume burnishing. “What does it [matter](#)?” might well be her campaign theme song.

Still, early opinion sees her as heir apparent; window dressing wife to a flawed ex-president and faithful handmaid to a weak sitting president. Never mind two unsuccessful wars, economic malaise, the healthcare fiasco, the PRISM meltdown, and the Benghazi blunders. None of the Obama bumbling has tarnished Hillary's [prospects](#) on the Left – or the iconic status she enjoys with major Media outlets.


A Press corps which failed to hold the “first black” president accountable is unlikely to queer the chances for the first woman to hold the country's highest office. Hillary's genitals, like Obama's African father, are likely to play a major role in the run-up to 2016. Sex, race, and social pandering are the threads from which a progressive campaign is woven these days.

Facts and accomplishments seldom matter as much as spin in any election. Hillary is clearly the front runner in the more crucial emotional contest. “First woman” cuts a wider emotional

and demographic swath than “first African” American by any reckoning. The sensitivity sweet spot for 2016 will be the quest for another [cultural](#) milestone; a woman in the Oval Office. Hillary is *the* woman of the Left at *the* right moment. Her time is now – or never.

Surely, Mrs. Clinton has ridden Bill’s coat tails to the Senate and Cabinet. Nonetheless, if she goes for the brass ring, her opponent will not be running against Hilary; her opposite number will be running against a cultural “first,” a formidable challenge for any potential candidate. The only way Republicans might neutralize the gender edge would be to put a woman at the top on their ticket or nominate a stellar female second chair. Some gal without a pants suit or priapic spouse might offer a telling contrast.

The smartest Clinton move to date was to put Foggy Bottom in the rearview mirror. Hillary has three years now to burnish her image, cultivate the like-minded, and let any previous missteps fade from public memory. Any mess that Obama leaves will be difficult to pin on Hillary.

In contrast, Christie’s every public move and spoken word as governor will be sifted for  ammunition for the next three years. The pot shots have already begun.

Traffic [jams](#) in Fort Lee are now national news. What’s Fort Lee you might ask? Fort Lee is the Jersey end of the George Washington Bridge over the Hudson River. Traffic there is now big news, as is pork barrel [arm twisting](#) in any New Jersey borough populated by Democrats.

How does any of this compare with the Benghazi fiasco? Every New York bound commuter knows the crawl through Fort Lee. That same demographic probably couldn’t find Benghazi or [Fallujah](#) with a compass, a map, and GPS. American national security fiascos are background noise, sponsored traffic jams are real traumas in places like New Jersey and New York.

In many ways, Christie seems to be the perfect foil for Mrs. Clinton, caught as he is on the horns of the gender dilemma. If Christy swaggers at the national level as he does in Jersey, he will look like a bully. If he reinvents himself to look like a Romney clone, Hillary will ‘bravo’ slap him like a wimp. If [performances](#) before the Select Committees on Intelligence provide any evidence, male politicians have to change their knickers after any encounter with Hillary.

Sex in modern politics, like race, has advantages and immunities. Hillary should be better at dealing from the bottom of the gender deck than Obama plays race cards. Just as criticism of Obama is now [dismissed](#) as racism, surely any criticism of Mrs. Clinton will be portrayed as sexism or misogyny – by team Hillary and the Media.

If democrats are allowed to define the next presidential election as a “war on women,” instead of a “war of women,” a third term for the Clintons becomes a sure thing.

Facts never matter as much as emotions. In a world of girly men and manly women, Mrs. Clinton has a pant leg up. The black and minority vote was near unanimous for Barak Obama and he captured the lion’s share of ladies. When you add these groups to the overlapping dependent demographic, Hillary almost seems inevitable. Like 2012, Mrs. Clinton may emerge as the better of two poor choices.

And Republicans seem to have learned nothing from the last presidential election. They seem to be using the same playbook that led to the Romney defeat. Take the Robert Gates book tour as an example. Robert Gates, moderate Republican and former Secretary of Defense, is doing for Mrs. Clinton what Chris Christie did for Mister Obama just before the 2012 voting.

When Christie embraced Obama between hurricane Sandy and the 2012 election, that iconic [moment](#) allowed Obama to look bipartisan and presidential. Real world Obama might be the most divisive president of the 21st Century. Christie could have taken a federal hand-out and avoided that very public fawning, a moment that was sure to be more fungible for Obama than Romney – or Christie.

Now we see Bob Gates doing a similar favor for Hillary. Not just in the book, *Duty*, where Hillary is celebrated as a strong and effective on national security, but high praise is repeated for television audiences on the various [chat shows](#) whenever the Hillary presidential prospect is predictably discussed. Gates, like Christie, is too savvy not to know that such televised moments will be replayed like endorsements in the voting season. If we assume that Christie and Gates act from conviction, we might also assume that they believe that Democrats are putting up better candidates.

Democrats and other liberals should be celebrating conservative affection for the Second Amendment. Republican leaders, like no other political party, seem to have a generational propensity for self-inflicted wounds, shooting themselves in the foot.

Liberals and Democrats seem to understand modern politics better than Republicans and conservatives anyway. Truth for the Left is whatever advances the ball towards nirvana. Logic and morality, if they matter, are the servants of promises that cannot be kept. Alas, the average voter probably couldn’t spell syllogism or recognize a moral argument in any case. Political emotions talk while tedious facts just squawk. If an argument doesn’t touch an emotional G-Spot, the political message is likely to be lost.

Politics is also a zero-sum game, winners and losers. If you don't win in modern democratic elections; facts, reason, and moralizing become so much posturing. Being right or ethical may be necessary, but it's never sufficient. Only winners get to change or retool the rules.

A Clinton/Christie contest in 2016 is by no means a certainty; but, if such a match does occur, there's a lot to be said for good political theater. Overstating the potential entertainment values in three face-to-face Clinton/Christie national debates is impossible – even this far out.

G. Murphy Donovan writes about the politics of national security.

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