

# Hillary's Fiasco

Hillary Clinton's latest debacle, with her e-mails, has been such a shambles of mismanaged, fumbling obfuscation that many prominent members of the media have tentatively concluded that she is faltering as a presidential candidate approximately a month before her candidacy (which has been in progress for at least 30 years) is announced. The great and delightful Peggy Noonan has even been musing in print about whether Hillary Clinton seriously retains an ambition to be president, that Mrs. Clinton has become such a denizen of the opulent apartments of Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue that she is wavering in her longstanding fervor to reach the presidency in her own right. We are all unlicensed psychiatrists, and Peggy Noonan is better qualified to opine on the ambitions of Hillary Clinton as analyst than I am, but I doubt it. The Upper East Side, even at its most palatial, reception rooms festooned with expensive works of art, furniture, and *objets*, is not the White House, and statues are not raised up to, nor banknotes emblazoned with the countenances of, the merely rich and philanthropic. If she gets to and eventually retires from the White House, the Clintons' joint earning power will propel them into that milieu and lifestyle anyway, if that is their ambition. They are a long way already from what Peggy Noonan called life "on some bum-squat-Egypt southern governor's salary."

Mrs. Clinton certainly looked tired and sounded implausible, evasive, and complacent but edgy at her press conference. She tried to palm off her self-appropriation of government records from her days as secretary of state, and deletion of cyber-documents she knew she had an obligation to conserve and to treat securely (and not on a relatively unprotected private server), all as a matter of "convenience," citing the practice of General Colin Powell when he was the secretary of state. She deleted scores of thousands of messages (though if the

House of Representatives' subpoena for her e-mail records had not been treated so contemptuously by Attorney General Eric Holder, their retrieval could be effected, unless she has deep-sixed the hard drives as well). Her references to having only one rather than two e-mail-transmission devices (also for "convenience") and to the frequency of personal messages with her husband on the shared server were immediately exposed by the media as inconsistent with her frequent public statements that she carried two such devices with her, and to President Clinton's assertion that he had sent only two e-mails in his life.

It all smacks of some of her famous nose-elongating whoppers strewn along her now lengthy public career. As I mentioned in my [piece](#) here several weeks ago about the habitual untruthfulness of politicians and political journalists such as Brian Williams, Senator Clinton's fabrications have included claiming – when she was trying to establish her foreign-policy credentials as a presidential candidate in 2008 – that she had dodged sniper fire at Sarajevo Airport when she was first lady, and telling a New Zealand audience that her parents had named her after the conqueror of Mount Everest, New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary. News film showed a serene reception for her at Sarajevo Airport, with little girls curtsying demurely as they presented flowers, and an honor guard; and Sir Edmund reached the summit of Mount Everest six years after Hillary Clinton was born and christened, requiring supernatural powers of foresight from her parents for her remarks to have been accurate. These outrages with the facts are commonplace from politicians; remember John Kerry's self-serving fiction about being a swift-boat hero in Vietnam, and current U.S. senators Richard Blumenthal (D., Conn.) and Mark Kirk (R., Ill.) embellishing their military service (in, respectively, Vietnam, concerning which Blumenthal "misspoke," and Iraq, about which Kirk "misremembered it wrong" as having been under anti-aircraft fire). The public, dumbed down and cynical, doesn't notice as it once did.

Those Clinton episodes, and many like them, were relatively innocuous; the destruction of government property in the form of archival records of one of the nation's highest offices, where questions of her own performance and an irreplaceable record of international relations are involved, is a transgression on a different level. The distasteful sense of Senator Clinton's stonewalling and virtual disparagement of any legitimate media interest in the subject was compounded by her absolute refusal to do anything to reverse the effect of her actions. "The server will remain private," she said.

I doubt that the Clinton Teflon is going to be effective this time, and it was never as impenetrable with her as with Bill, though she limped through the miraculous conversion of \$1,000 to \$100,000 in ten months' commodity trading astoundingly unscathed. Bill Clinton was always a likeable scoundrel with a twinkle in his eye. She is a less charming public personality, but has generally projected herself as a more politically virtuous one. Mrs. Clinton has got through many of these evident improvisations and revisions of facts because she was not where the buck stopped, but now that she is cranking up to seek to occupy that place, the standard by which she will be judged will be less indulgent of the Clinton notion that the rules don't necessarily apply to them, at least not after a resolute stonewall. Her evasive and almost certainly untruthful claims about the circumstances of the murder of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and several other American officials, and her preposterous speech to the Muslims of the world putting forward the Islamophilic Obama-Clinton message with the implication that the Benghazi murders were the result of an American private citizen's anti-Islamist video (and not the action of terrorists whom their administration had already supposedly exterminated), are still contested in the abrasive tug-of-war between the Republican congressional majorities and the administration.

The effect of these problems is likely to be cumulative, and

the Democrats cannot be certain that the Republicans will again nominate a candidate who is a tactical blunderbuss like John McCain or a consultant who faces, like a revolving clock, in all four directions on every issue, like Mitt Romney. It remains the party of Dwight Eisenhower, the always victorious general who demolished Adlai Stevenson's national-security and defense platform in 1956 in three minutes at a press conference; of Richard Nixon, who put Hubert Humphrey's "politics of joy" of 1968 to an unanswerable reality check; and of Ronald Reagan, who asked Americans in 1980 to apply the personal-benefit test to the record of his opponent (the hapless Jimmy Carter). Their most likely standard-bearer is Jeb Bush, the most unmalapropistic of the political Bushes, and even his father and brother took down their opponents, except for Bill Clinton. Hillary has left more hanging out than the 1988 Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis, with his absurd video of himself in an Army tank; or Al Gore, with his self-inflated claims to have invented the Internet and modern ecology; or John Kerry, with his masterly strategic aperçu that, though he had voted to invade Iraq, he had not voted to fund the expedition once it was launched.

An interesting conundrum has arisen for the Washington media, who are now fumbling over their own feet, alternately claiming that the free lunch for the Clintons is over, and, on the other foot, that they have always been hard on Hillary, so they have nothing to reproach themselves for, and that it is easy to run against the media so Hillary can turn any attack to her advantage by claiming that heavy criticism is misogyny and right-wing extremism. By this reasoning, the more egregious Mrs. Clinton's falsehoods and presumptions, the better she shall do with the voters, unless the media sagely, and in the interest of fairness, help her to cover them up. This slippery, self-serving hypocrisy from the mainstream national media isn't going to work this time. It isn't Watergate: Hillary Clinton is not the incumbent and there is no sign that she will mismanage these controversies as badly

as President Nixon did that crisis. But the bloom is somewhat off the Clinton rose, as the immense returning to the publisher of unsold copies of her last book indicated.

It might have been hoped that at this critical stage in its history the United States would have a more original menu than the Clintons and the Bushes, and to some extent such a choice will be for which option has bored the country less, for a shorter time, and less recently (not to deny that both the Bushes and the Clintons have rendered important and valuable service to the country on many occasions, but they're all a bit shopworn now). If that is the choice, it will be because the Democratic presidential nomination, at this point, is the most predetermined, unsuspenseful race for an open nomination to that office since Charles Evans Hughes was the Republican candidate in 1916 against Woodrow Wilson (as a reconciliation candidate between the Taft and Roosevelt factions). The country could do worse than Jeb and Hillary, and has done worse in the last four elections. But if Hillary Clinton is as casual with public sensibilities, and as poorly prepared to explain her actions, as she has been in this fatuous affair, she will be the most overconfident seeker of America's highest office since Thomas E. Dewey in 1948, and should expect to share the same fate.

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