

RELEASE IN PART
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Sent: Tuesday, October 16, 2012 5:23 PM
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Subject: FW:

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From: Nuland, Victoria J
Sent: Tuesday, October 16, 2012 5:16 PM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J; Reines, Philippe I; Abedin, Huma; Mills, Cheryl D
Subject:

Hillary: The Missed Opportunity (New York Times)

By Bill Keller

October 16, 2012, 12:35 pm

Back in January I proposed that President Obama do a switcheroo, sending Joe Biden to the State Department and making Hillary Clinton his running mate. I acknowledged the reasons that this was probably a fantasy, but contended the arguments in favor were as simple as one-two-three:

One: it does more to guarantee Obama's re-election than anything else the Democrats can do. Two: it improves the chances that, come next January, he will not be a lame duck with a gridlocked Congress but a rejuvenated president with a mandate and a Congress that may be a little less forbidding. Three: it makes Hillary the party's heir apparent in 2016.

The chorus of reader approval was loud, but did not include anyone named Obama, Biden or Clinton.

Now that Obama faces a real possibility of losing the White House, it gives me no pleasure to say "I told you so." Okay, maybe just a tiny bit of pleasure. In recent days my case has been strengthened by three pieces of evidence.

First and foremost, the gender gap appears to be closing. Today's USA TODAY/Gallup Poll shows that likely female voters in the critical swing states are split 49-48 for Obama – a statistical tie where Obama used to, and ought to, and has to, enjoy a substantial margin. The Obama campaign of course disputes the data as "implausible," but the general drift of women toward Romney is consistent with the trend in other polls.

A couple of factors may be at work here. One is that the Obama campaign seems to have taken the loyalty of women a little for granted lately. After a party convention that showcased women, beatified Lilly Ledbetter and made a mantra out of women's right to make their own health care decisions (the latest euphemism for keeping abortion legal) Obama ignored the subject in his disastrous first debate. The Democrats' strategy for mobilizing women in the home stretch seems to be a regular Obama guest spot on The View and a channel of YouTube endorsements from female stars of screen and stage. Will the suburban moms of Ohio flock to Obama because Whoopi Goldberg and Eva Longoria and Beyonce say so?

Meanwhile, Mitt Romney has succeeded in softening his image enough to make himself an acceptable alternative to women who care (as polls say these moderate swing voters do) about social issues and the safety net as well as jobs. By soft-pedaling his opposition to abortion and pushing the mute button on his running mate's even more Paleolithic views; by insisting, contrary to the evidence, that he has a humane replacement for Obamacare; by talking up education and bipartisanship, Romney has diverted attention from the heartless plutocrat persona forged by his behavior in the Republican primaries and by millions of dollars in early Obama attack ads. The most effective reality check on all of this would have been Hillary Clinton who...well, let me quote myself:

She would bring to this year's campaign a missing warmth and some of the voltage that has dissipated as Obama moved from campaigning to governing. What excites is not just the prospect of having a woman a heartbeat — and four years — away from the presidency, although she certainly embodies the aspirations of many women. It's the possibility that the first woman at the top would have qualifications so manifest that her first-ness was a secondary consideration.

Unfortunately, as Secretary of State, Clinton is not allowed to campaign at all.

Which brings us to the second reason: Joe Biden. I like Joe Biden. He was a fine senator and has been an able vice president. As a campaigner, he may put a little fire in the blue-collar section of the base, and I could possibly be persuaded that his debate performance did more good than harm. At least it staunched the bleeding. But I don't think Biden on the stump or Biden smirking and guffawing his way through 90 minutes of prime time has done anything to make the promise of four more years exciting to those not already enraptured, or to undermine the Republicans' plausibility. As a debater in 2008, Hillary started a bit wobbly but by the end of the season had found an appealing balance of authority, passion and empathy. Now enriched by her time as diplomat in chief, she'd have been a much better counter to the young policy wonk and gym rat, Paul Ryan.

Third, Clinton's willingness to step up yesterday and take the rap for any failings at the consulate in Libya was the kind of classy move that is all too scarce. As The Times's David Kirkpatrick pointed out this morning, the attack on the consulate is a complicated story oversimplified by election-year politics. But at the very least it was a terrible thing that happened on this administration's watch, and the early explanations had an air of wishful thinking, if not political spin. Clinton said yesterday what Obama and Biden have failed to say: The buck stops here.

There has long been a view among Obama's closest confidants that, with the Clintons, it's always about the Clintons. But in a cabinet that was originally hailed as a "team of rivals," Hillary's emphasis has consistently been on "team" rather than "rival."

Oh, heck, why not quote myself one more time:

The Obama inner circle believes the president doesn't need Hillary to win a second term. Just now [in January], when the Republican field looks like a bug-spattered windshield and the most likely nominee strikes many in his own party as an empty suit, that confidence is understandable. But Democrats should not get too cocky. Mitt Romney, as I've argued before, has a case to make to voters and the resources to make it.

He does, and he is, and meanwhile the Democrats have left their best answer on the bench.