

# Is Hillary Clinton ‘Qualified’?

**Exclusive:** The question of “qualifications” is suddenly at the center of the Democratic race with Hillary Clinton’s backers touting her résumé but ignoring her many failures in job after job, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has dismissed Sen. Bernie Sanders questioning her qualifications to be President as “silly” – and looking at her résumé alone, she’d be right – but there is also the need to judge her performance in her various jobs.

What is troubling about Clinton’s record is that she has left behind a trail strewn with failures and even catastrophes. Indeed, her highest profile undertakings almost universally ended in disaster – and a person’s record should matter when voters are deciding whether to entrust him or her with the most powerful office on earth.

In other words, it’s not just a question of her holding one prestigious job or another; it’s also how well she did in those jobs. Otherwise, you have a case of the Peter Principle Squared, not just letting someone rise to the level of his or her incompetence, but in Clinton’s case, continuing to get promoted beyond her level of incompetence.

So, looking behind Clinton’s résumé is important. After all, she presents herself as the can-do candidate who will undertake small-scale reforms that may not move the needle much but are better than nothing and may be all that’s possible given the bitterly divided Congress.

But is Hillary Clinton really a can-do leader? Since she burst onto the national scene with her husband’s presidential election in 1992, she has certainly traveled a lot, given many speeches and met many national and foreign leaders – which surely has some value – but it’s hard to identify much in the way of her meaningful accomplishments.

Clinton’s most notable undertaking as First Lady was her disastrous health insurance plan that was concocted with her characteristic secrecy and then was unveiled to decidedly mixed reviews. Much of the scheme was mind-numbing in its complexity and – because of the secrecy – it lacked sufficient input from Congress where it found few enthusiastic supporters.

Not only did the plan collapse under its own weight, but it helped take many Democratic members of Congress with it, as the Republicans reversed a long era

of Democratic control of the House of Representatives in 1994. Because of Hillary Clinton's health-care disaster, a chastened Democratic Party largely took the idea of providing near-universal health-insurance coverage to Americans off the table for the next 15 years.

In Clinton's next career as a senator from New York, her most notable action was to enthusiastically support President George W. Bush's Iraq War. Clinton did not just vote to authorize the war in 2002, she remained a war supporter until 2006 when it became politically untenable to do so, that is, if she had any hope of winning the Democratic presidential nomination against anti-war Sen. Barack Obama.

Both in her support for the war in the early years and her politically expedient switch – along with a grudging apology for her “mistake” – Clinton showed very little courage.

When she was supporting the war, the post-9/11 wind was at Bush's back. So Clinton joined him in riding the jingoistic wave. By 2006, the American people had turned against the war and the Republican Party was punished at the polls for it, losing control of Congress. So it was no profile-in-courage for Clinton to distance herself from Bush then.

### **Not Learning Lessons**

Still, Clinton seemed to have learned little about the need to ask probing questions of Bush's team. In November 2006, she completely misread Bush's firing of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and replacing him with ex-CIA Director Robert Gates. Serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Clinton bought the conventional wisdom that Gates's nomination meant that Bush was winding down the Iraq War despite warnings that it actually meant the opposite.

If Clinton had done any digging, she could have discovered that Rumsfeld was dumped not because of his warmongering but because he backed his field generals – George Casey and John Abizaid – who wanted to rapidly shrink the U.S. military “footprint” in Iraq. But Bush and his neocon advisers saw that as effectively an admission of defeat, so they got rid of Rumsfeld and recruited the more malleable Gates to front for their planned escalation or “surge.”

Not only did Consortiumnews.com spell out that reality in real time, but it also was explained by right-wing pundit Fred Barnes in the neocon Weekly Standard. As Barnes wrote, Gates “is *not* the point man for a boarding party of former national security officials from the elder President Bush's administration taking over defense and foreign policy in his son's administration. ... Rarely has the press gotten a story so wrong.”

Barnes reported instead that the younger George Bush didn't consult his father and only picked Gates after a two-hour face-to-face meeting at which the younger Bush got assurances that Gates was onboard with the neocon notion of "democracy promotion" in the Middle East and shared Bush's goal of victory in Iraq. [The Weekly Standard, Nov. 27, 2006]

But the mainstream press – and much of Official Washington – loved the other storyline. A Newsweek cover pictured a large George H.W. Bush towering over a small George W. Bush. Embracing this conventional wisdom, Clinton and other Senate Armed Services Committee members brushed aside the warnings about Gates, both his troubling history at the CIA and his likely support for a war escalation.

In his 2014 memoir, *Duty*, Gates reflects on his 2006 nomination and how completely clueless Official Washington was. Regarding the conventional wisdom about Bush-41 taking the reins from Bush-43, Gates wrote about his recruitment by the younger Bush: "It was clear he had not consulted his father about this possible appointment and that, contrary to later speculation, Bush 41 had no role in it."

Regarding the mainstream news media's wrongheaded take on his nomination, Gates wrote: "There was a lot of hilarious commentary about a return to '41's' team, the president's father coming to the rescue, former secretary of state Jim Baker pulling all the strings behind the scenes, and how I was going to purge the Pentagon of Rumsfeld's appointees, 'clean out the E-Ring' (the outer corridor of the Pentagon where most senior Defense civilians have their offices). It was all complete nonsense."

Though Gates doesn't single out Hillary Clinton for misreading the significance of his nomination, Gates wrote: "The Democrats were even more enthusiastic, believing my appointment would somehow hasten the end of the war. ... They professed to be enormously pleased with my nomination and offered their support, I think mainly because they thought that I, as a member of the Iraq Study Group [which had called for winding down the war], would embrace their desire to begin withdrawing from Iraq."

In other words, Hillary Clinton got fooled again.

### **Surging for Surges**

Once installed at the Pentagon, Gates became a central figure in the Iraq War "surge," which dispatched 30,000 more U.S. troops to Iraq in 2007. The "surge" saw casualty figures spike. Nearly 1,000 additional American died along with an untold number of Iraqis. And despite another conventional wisdom about the

“successful surge” it failed to achieve its central goal of getting the Iraqis to achieve compromises on their sectarian divisions.

Yet, the mainstream press didn’t get any closer to the mark in 2008 when it began cheering the Iraq “surge” as a great success, getting spun by the neocons who noted a gradual drop in the casualty levels. The media honchos, many of whom supported the invasion in 2003, ignored that Bush had laid out specific policy goals for the “surge,” none of which were achieved.

In *Duty*, Gates reminds us of those original targets, writing: “Prior to the deployment, clear benchmarks should be established for the Iraqi government to meet during the time of the augmentation, from national reconciliation to revenue sharing, etc.”

Those benchmarks were set for the Iraqi government to meet, but the goals were never achieved, either during the “surge” or since then. To this day, Iraq remains a society bitterly divided along sectarian lines with the out-of-power Sunnis again sidling up to Al Qaeda-connected extremists and even the Islamic State.

But Clinton didn’t have the courage or common sense to recognize that the Iraq War “surge” had failed. After Obama appointed her as Secretary of State – as part of a naïve gesture of outreach to a “team of rivals” – Clinton fell back in line behind Official Washington’s new favorite conventional wisdom, the “successful surge.”

In the end, all the Iraq War “surge” did was buy President Bush and his neocon advisers time to get out of office before the failure of the Iraq War became obvious to the American public. Its other primary consequence was to encourage Defense Secretary Gates, who was kept on by President Obama as a gesture of bipartisanship, to conjure up another “surge” for Afghanistan.

In that context, in *Duty*, Gates recounts a 2009 White House meeting regarding the Afghan War “surge.” He wrote: “The exchange that followed was remarkable. In strongly supporting the surge in Afghanistan, Hillary told the president that her opposition to the surge in Iraq had been political because she was facing him in the Iowa primary [in 2008]. She went on to say, ‘The Iraq surge worked.’

“The president conceded vaguely that opposition to the Iraq surge had been political. To hear the two of them making these admissions, and in front of me, was as surprising as it was dismaying.” Obama’s aides disputed Gates’s suggestion that the President indicated that his opposition to the Iraq “surge” was political, noting that he had always opposed the Iraq War. The Clinton team never challenged Gates’s account.

In other words, having been an Iraq War hawk when it mattered – from 2002-06 – Hillary Clinton changed direction when that was politically expedient, apologizing for her “mistake,” but then returned to her enthusiasm for the war by accepting the benighted view that the “surge worked.”

Clinton’s enthusiasm for “surges” also influenced her to side with Gates and General David Petraeus, a neocon favorite, to pressure Obama into a “surge” for Afghanistan, sending in an additional 30,000 troops on a bloody, ill-fated “counterinsurgency” mission. Again, the cost in American lives was about 1,000 soldiers but their sacrifice did little to shift the war’s outcome.

### **Winning Praise**

Again and again, Hillary Clinton seemed incapable of learning from her costly errors – or perhaps she just understands that the politically safest course is to do what Washington’s neocon-dominated foreign policy establishment wants done. That way you get hailed as a serious thinker in the editorial pages of The Washington Post and at the think-tank conferences.

Virtually all the major columnists and big-name pundits praised Clinton’s hawkish tendencies as Secretary of State, from her escalating tensions with Iran to tipping the balance of the Obama administration’s debate in favor of a “regime change” mission in Libya to urging direct U.S. military intervention in Syria in pursuit of another “regime change” there.

On the campaign trail, Clinton seeks to spin all these militaristic recommendations as somehow beneficial to the United States. But the reality is quite different.

Regarding Iran, in 2010, Secretary Clinton personally killed a promising initiative sponsored by Brazil and Turkey (at President Obama’s request) to get Iran to swap much of its low-enriched uranium for radiological medical tests. Instead, Clinton followed the path laid out by Israel and the neocons, ratchet up pressure on Iran and keep open the “bomb-bomb-bomb Iran” option.

It is noteworthy that the diplomatic agreement with Iran to restrain its nuclear program and to give up much of its low-enriched uranium required Clinton’s departure from the State Department in 2013. I’m told that Obama understood that he needed to get her out of the way for the diplomacy to work.

But Clinton’s signature project as Secretary of State was another war of choice, this time the “regime change” in Libya resulting in the grisly murder of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 and the descent of Libya into a failed state beset with terrorism, including the killing of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. diplomatic personnel in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012, and more recently

the emergence of the Islamic State.

Clinton and her “liberal interventionist” allies sold the Libyan war as a “responsibility to protect” mission – or R2P – but the propaganda about Gaddafi’s supposed plans for “genocide” against the Libyan people was wildly exaggerated and fit with a long and sorry pattern of U.S. officials deceiving the U.S. public. [For more details, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Covering Up Hillary’s Libyan Fiasco.”](#)]

### **Taking Credit**

According to all accounts, Obama was on the fence about the wisdom of joining European nations in undertaking the Libyan “regime change” and it was Secretary Clinton who tipped his decision toward going to war. The U.S. military then provided the crucial technological infrastructure for the war to go forward. Without the U.S. involvement, the “regime change” in Libya wouldn’t have happened.

As the conflict raged, Clinton’s State Department [email exchanges](#) revealed that her aides saw the Libyan war as a chance to pronounce a “Clinton doctrine,” bragging about how Clinton’s clever use of “smart power” could get rid of demonized foreign leaders like Gaddafi. But President Obama seized the spotlight when Gaddafi’s government fell.

But Clinton didn’t miss a second chance to take credit on Oct. 20, 2011, after militants captured Gaddafi, sodomized him with a knife and then murdered him. Appearing on a TV interview, Clinton [celebrated](#) Gaddafi’s demise with the quip, “we came; we saw; he died.”

However, with Gaddafi and his largely secular regime out of the way, Islamic militants expanded their power over the country. Many, it turned out, were terrorists, just as Gaddafi had warned. Some were responsible for killing Ambassador Stevens.

Over the next five years, Libya – a once prosperous North African country – descended into anarchy with dozens of armed militias and now three competing governments jockeying for power. Meanwhile, the Islamic State expanded its territory around the city of Sirte and engaged in its signature practice of beheading “infidels,” including a group of Coptic Christians slaughtered on a beach.

Yet, on the campaign trail, Clinton continues to defend her instigation of the Libyan war, disputing any comparisons between it and the Iraq War by rejecting any [“conflating”](#) of the two. Yet, the two disasters – while obviously having some differences – do deserve to be conflated because they have many

similarities. Both were wars of choice justified by false and misleading claims and having terrible outcomes.

Clinton's rejection of "conflating" the two wars has another disturbing element to it, the suggestion that she is incapable of extracting lessons from one situation and applying them to another. That inability to analyze, engage in self-criticism, and thus avoid repeating the same mistakes may indeed be a disqualifying characteristic for someone seeking the U.S. presidency.

So, is Hillary Clinton "qualified" to be President of the United States? While her glittering résumé may say one thing, her record – a litany of misjudgments, miscalculations and catastrophes – may say something else.

[For information about Hillary Clinton's earlier career, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Clinton's Experience: Fact and Fantasy.](#)"]

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## Covering Up Hillary's Libyan Fiasco

**Exclusive:** Despite Libya's bloodshed and chaos, ex-Secretary of State Clinton still defends her key role in the 2011 "regime change," but her reasons don't withstand scrutiny, as Jonathan Marshall explains.

By Jonathan Marshall

Years after the end of the Vietnam War, as memories of its horrors and folly dimmed, [conservative "revisionists"](#) emerged to peddle the myth that U.S. commitment there was both justified and "winnable." By obfuscating the historical record, they sought to undo the painful lessons learned by a generation of Americans about the perils of intervention and the costs of government lying.

The same kind of revisionism is being peddled today by interventionists to explain away a staggeringly costly string of more recent American failures in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Iraq and other theaters of conflict. A new article by Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Shadi Hamid, who touts the nobility of NATO's disastrous campaign in Libya, illustrates the shameless mythmaking of such revisionists.

Last year, Glenn Greenwald reminded us that Brookings – the venue for Hillary Clinton’s first major foreign policy campaign address – “served as Ground Zero for centrist think tank advocacy of the Iraq War . . . Brookings’ two leading ‘scholar’-stars – Kenneth Pollack and Michael O’Hanlon – spent all of 2002 and 2003 insisting that invading Iraq was wise and just, and spent the years after that assuring Americans that the “victorious” war and subsequent occupation were going really well . . .

“Since then, O’Hanlon in particular has advocated for increased military force in more countries than one can count. That’s not surprising: Brookings is funded in part by one of the Democratic Party’s favorite billionaires, Haim Saban, who is a dual citizen of the U.S. and Israel and once said of himself: ‘I’m a one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel.’”

Hamid, the think-tank’s senior fellow in the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, is cut from the same cloth. Following publication of Jeffrey Goldberg’s recent interview with President Obama in The Atlantic magazine, Hamid accused Obama of drawing the wrong lessons from Iraq and thus shying away from using military force in foreign conflicts such as Syria.

Of course, Hamid’s argument falls flat because Obama *did* approve the use of force in Libya in March 2011, leading to the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi and a host of now-familiar consequences: ongoing civil war, economic collapse, the rapid spread of jihadists in Libya and across North Africa, and a massive refugee crisis.

Now, on Vox.com, Hamid argues that Obama was right to intervene in Libya – and that widespread condemnation of NATO’s operation as a “failure” or “disaster” is fundamentally misguided. “NATO intervened to protect civilians, not to set up a democracy,” he declares. “And that is what was achieved.”

Evidently, we should take comfort from this success that “only” 4,500 people were killed during the first phase of Libya’s civil war, and only two million Libyans – a third of the population – have become refugees. Hamid’s logic suggests further that we overlook the “crimes against humanity” committed by anti-Gaddafi rebels, including systematic killings, torture, detentions, and forced displacement of tens of thousands of black Libyans.

### **Dishonest Defense**

Hillary Clinton, who argued forcefully for the mission during her tenure as secretary of state, may rejoice at this defense of her policy, but Hamid’s claims are disingenuous at best, verging on dishonest.

“Here’s what we know,” Hamid writes: “By March 19, 2011, when the NATO operation

began, the death toll in Libya had risen rapidly to more than 1,000 in a relatively short amount of time, confirming Qaddafi's longstanding reputation as someone who was willing to kill his countrymen (as well as others) in large numbers if that's what his survival required."

"There was no end in sight," he insists. Without NATO's intervention, "The most likely outcome . . . was a Syria-like situation of indefinite, intensifying violence."

Of course, even with NATO's intervention, Libya today does suffer from "indefinite, intensifying violence," albeit far from Syrian levels. It results from ongoing clashes between rival militias and large numbers of ISIS fighters who are entrenched in Gaddafi's former home of Sirte thanks to the disintegration of his regime.

As a recent article in London's *Independent* noted, "ISIS's expansion in Libya has been alarming, and the country's civil war and lack of a coherent government structure provide a fertile ground for extremism. . . . US officials have said that ISIS now has the capability to organize attacks on Western targets out of its base in Libya."

Meanwhile, reenergized and rearmed by the collapse of Gaddafi's army, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has made a "devastating comeback" and is now "storming into new territory across three nations," according to *The New York Times*.

Hamid blames all such unpleasantness on NATO's failure to intervene *more* in Libya to rebuild the country's institutions after eliminating Gaddafi. Too bad NATO forgot to study its playbook of previously successful nation-building exercises in Africa and the Middle East. Oh yes – all of its pages are empty.

But what about Hamid's claim that NATO at least prevented more violence in the short run?

In a recent review of the Obama administration's decision to intervene in Libya, *New York Times* correspondents Joe Becker and Scott Shane report that claims of impending massacres cited in defense of NATO's intervention were bogus: "Human Rights Watch would later count about 350 protesters killed before the intervention – not the thousands described in some media accounts."

Even at the time, Amnesty International rejected propaganda claims by rebels – widely cited by Clinton and other war advocates – that Gaddafi's troops had engaged in mass rapes, hired bloodthirsty foreign mercenaries, or turned its aircraft against civilians. "We have not found any evidence or a single victim of rape or a doctor who knew about somebody being raped," said a senior adviser to the human rights organization.

Similarly, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen told Congress on March 2, 2011 – before formal approval of the NATO intervention – that they had no confirmation of inflammatory reports that Libyan aircraft were firing on civilians.

### **Propaganda over Truth**

The distinguished North Africa scholar Hugh Robert later noted that “The story was untrue, just as the story that went round the world in August 1990 that Iraqi troops were slaughtering Kuwaiti babies by turning off their incubators was untrue and the claims in the sexed-up dossier on Saddam’s WMD were untrue.”

The *Washington Times* reported last year that “The intelligence community gathered no specific evidence of an impending genocide in Libya in spring 2011, undercutting Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s primary argument for using the U.S. military to remove Col. Moammar Gadhafi from power, an event that has left his country in chaos.”

Contrary to claims by Clinton and President Obama that Gaddafi was threatening to “massacre” tens of thousands of people in Benghazi, the paper reported, “the Pentagon’s judgment was that Gadhafi was unlikely to risk world outrage by inflicting large civilian casualties” and “defense officials had direct information . . . that Gadhafi gave specific orders not to attack civilians and to narrowly focus the war on the armed rebels.”

On April 14, 2011, just weeks after the start of NATO’s operation, University of Texas scholar Alan Kuperman made mincemeat of Obama’s claim that he was preventing a slaughter of civilians. “The best evidence that Khadafy did not plan genocide in Benghazi is that he did not perpetrate it in the [four] other cities he had recaptured either fully or partially,” Kuperman noted.

“Nor did Khadafy ever threaten civilian massacre in Benghazi, as Obama alleged. The ‘no mercy’ warning, of March 17, targeted rebels only, as reported by *The New York Times*, which noted that Libya’s leader promised amnesty for those ‘who throw their weapons away.’ Khadafy even offered the rebels an escape route and open border to Egypt, to avoid a fight ‘to the bitter end.’”

Kuperman warned at the time that far from protecting innocent lives, “intervening actually magnifies the threat to civilians in Libya, and beyond. That is because armed uprisings, such as Libya’s, typically provoke massive state retaliation that harms innocents.”

In an ex-post analysis of the Libyan conflict two years later, Kuperman concluded that his dire predictions had come true.

“When NATO intervened in mid-March 2011, Qaddafi already had regained control of most of Libya, while the rebels were retreating rapidly toward Egypt. Thus, the conflict was about to end, barely six weeks after it started, at a toll of about 1,000 dead, including soldiers, rebels, and civilians caught in the crossfire. By intervening, NATO enabled the rebels to resume their attack, which prolonged the war for another seven months and caused at least 7,000 more deaths.”

He added, “NATO’s action magnified the conflict’s duration about sixfold and its death toll at least sevenfold, while also exacerbating human rights abuses, humanitarian suffering, Islamic radicalism, and weapons proliferation in Libya and its neighbors. If Libya was a ‘model intervention,’ then it was a model of failure.”

### **Less Than Noble Motives**

Did Clinton and Obama simply misread the intelligence while acting on humanitarian motives?

A recent report in the *New York Times* suggests that what moved President Obama was *not* a moral argument about saving civilians, but Clinton’s practical argument that intervention would allow the administration to shape the situation while supporting traditional European and Arab allies who wanted Gaddafi ousted.

Worse yet, Secretary Clinton rejected an overture by Gaddafi’s son in mid-March 2011 for talks that could have brought peace to the country. Before long, Washington and its allies were openly fighting for regime change, not to protect civilians caught in a civil war.

Clinton also knew that NATO leaders were using humanitarian rhetoric to cloak more sordid *raisons d’etat*. In an email to Secretary Clinton on March 22, 2011, her confidant Sidney Blumenthal noted that French intelligence had helped organize and fund the Libyan rebels, in return for them supporting “French firms and national interests, particularly regarding the oil industry in Libya.”

In a subsequent email to Clinton on April 2, 2011, Blumenthal confirmed that “Sarkozy’s plans are driven by the following issues: a. A desire to gain a greater share of Libya oil production, b. Increase French influence in North Africa, c. Improve his internal political situation in France, d. Provide the French military with an opportunity to reassert its position in the world, e. Address the concern of his advisors over Qaddafi’s long term plans to supplant France as the dominant power in Francophone Africa.”

In other words, the Libya intervention was grounded in base motives and it led – as numerous critics warned at the time – to a regional catastrophe that haunts

Europe and the United States to this day. Hamid may count Libya as a model intervention, he ranks among a dwindling number of true believers.

Retired General and Secretary of State Colin Powell said last year, “as we learned, especially in Libya, when you remove the top and the whole thing falls apart, there’s nothing underneath it you get chaos.”

And only a week before Hamid published his encyclical on the morality of bombing Libya, the famed former head of Israel’s Mossad, Ephraim Halevy, offered a few observations of his own on that misadventure.

“I think the operation originally launched by Britain and France turned out to be the biggest mistake committed by Western Europe in recent years,” he told an interviewer for Sky Television. “The initiative to go into Libya was a major mistake, and . . . now Libya is a center of ISIS, which is a real threat to Europe, and the European capacity to find elements on the ground who can stop this, and move in and destroy the ISIS presence in Libya, do not exist anymore.”

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were “Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions”; “Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran”; “Saudi Cash Wins France’s Favor”; “The Saudis’ Hurt Feelings”; “Saudi Arabia’s Nuclear Bluster”; “The US Hand in the Syrian Mess”; and “Hidden Origins of Syria’s Civil War.” ]

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