

Clinton Toned Down Her Hawkishness

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton's strongest point in Monday's debate may have been what she didn't say, as she avoided a return to her hawkish rhetoric that has alienated many anti-war Democrats, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

By most traditional standards of marshaled facts and detailed proposals, Hillary Clinton "won" the first presidential debate over a sometimes rattled and erratic Donald Trump, but perhaps her best decision was what she chose not to say: she steered clear of her most hawkish rhetoric that has unnerved the anti-war Democratic base.

Except for some relatively restrained comments about Russia's alleged role in hacking the Democratic National Committee's emails, Clinton didn't do what she has in some other venues, which is to engage in extreme Russia-bashing and to call for escalated U.S. military involvement in Syria.

In her last debate with Sen. Bernie Sanders, Clinton also continued to use hyperbole to justify her key role in the U.S.-backed "regime change" in Libya in 2011. Last April, she called the ousted, tortured and murdered Muammar Gaddafi "genocidal" to justify his fate – when that was clearly untrue (as a recent British parliamentary [report](#) concluded).

Earlier this year before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Clinton promised to take the U.S.-Israeli relationship to "the next level." That and her courtship of American neoconservatives have driven a number of anti-war Democrats away from her candidacy. Her bellicose rhetoric has sounded to some of these usually reliable Democratic voters like fingernails on a chalkboard. On Monday night, Clinton chose not to annoy them again, at least as much.

She even cleverly went on the offensive against Trump for allegedly supporting the Iraq War, which she also supported as a U.S. senator in 2002 and backed until 2006 when she reversed herself in hopes of winning the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination.

Trump has claimed repeatedly that he opposed the Iraq War although some pre-war comments suggested otherwise. By raising the issue first, Clinton forced Trump onto the defensive and into a convoluted explanation of his position. Clinton's more substantive support for the disastrous war went largely unaddressed.

Clinton also got to skate away from her promotion of the Libyan "regime change" that has left that oil-rich country in north Africa in political chaos five

years later and has given radical jihadists another foothold in the region.

Though largely ignored by the mainstream U.S. media, the British report and its blunt conclusions about Iraq-War-like deceptions on Libya could have become a damaging club to use against Clinton's diplomatic credentials and her trustworthiness. If pressed, would she continue to repeat the anti-Gaddafi exaggerations that were debunked by a bipartisan British parliamentary foreign policy committee?

Iran-Bashing

On Iran, Clinton even posed as the relative peace candidate by claiming a role in President Obama's diplomacy to ensure that Iran didn't develop a nuclear weapon, although her actual position was more hawkish than Obama's and more in line with Israel's desire to provoke another "regime change" in Tehran. Obama's diplomacy succeeded only after she left the job as secretary of state.

But Trump instead held to the tough-guy Republican position, denouncing the Iranian nuclear deal as a mistake, making himself look like the relative warmonger. For voters who are fed up with endless warfare and who are tired of Israel manipulating U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, Trump's belligerence on Iran didn't help with them.

Yet, whether Hillary Clinton's reticence on war talk represents a conscious decision or was simply driven by the dynamics of Monday's debate is unclear. She has seemed determined to ingratiate herself with Official Washington's neocons, apparently thinking that they are an influential opinion bloc or perhaps she is just one of them.

Whatever the outcome of the Nov. 8 election, there is little reason for celebration among Americans who want to pull back from the precipice of ever-wider and more dangerous wars.

Trump represents a wild card who favors negotiations with Russia and China but calls for an intensified war on "terrorism," including the reinstatement of torture and promises to "knock the hell" out of the Islamic State.

Clinton has a long record of pushing for wars behind the cloak of "humanitarianism," bloodshed rationalized by phony propaganda. She seems to have bought into the demonization of Vladimir Putin and the idea of a costly and dangerous New Cold War with Russia. She also has called for more electronic spying at home and abroad and for the assassination of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

So, whoever wins, anti-war Americans may have no choice but to organize to

challenge the war policies of the new president even before he or she takes office.

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](#)).
