

The boomerang effect

With polls showing Trump and Clinton in a dead heat for the nomination, new worries fill the Clinton campaign that negative news may cause her to plummet suddenly, as she has in primary after primary to Bernie Sanders. For over a year, Clinton and her operatives have promoted a false narrative about the email scandal hanging over her head like the sword of Damocles. She has assured supporters and the media that the FBI investigation is only a “security review,” terminology alien to FBI Director Comey who explains the obvious fact that indeed the FBI is engaged in a criminal investigation. Clinton has assured supporters and the media that at the end of the day FBI will find that she did nothing wrong. Clinton promises that there will be no indictment because she has done nothing wrong. Bill Clinton has belittled the criminal investigation, referring to it as a “game.” The dismissive approach taken by the Clinton campaign courts disaster. There is in that approach an inevitable boomerang effect that in the general election may well depress Democratic voter turnout or even cause Democrats who trusted Clinton’s word to vote for Trump when they learn they have been betrayed.

Hillary Clinton and her campaign team early on assessed how best to cope with public awareness of the FBI investigation into her violations of the Espionage Act (and, later, into word that FBI had expanded its investigation to include a public corruption probe). They had to decide whether to address the topic forthrightly and substantively and have Hillary explain her actions in a detailed narrative and apologize or respond with disdain and refuse to “dignify” the inquiry with a substantive response. They unwisely chose the latter approach, making the FBI investigation a ticking time bomb on two levels: She may well be indicted before November, eliminating her as a contender because she could be convicted and incarcerated; or enough of the details may become public

that she will incur the wrath of Democrats who initially trusted her representations but suddenly feel betrayed.

The Clinton campaign did not learn from either Richard Nixon or Bill Clinton's examples on the wrong way to deal with criminal wrongdoing. Accused of complicity in the Watergate burglary, Nixon steadfastly denied any knowledge or involvement until testimony from John Dean and others revealed answers to the question: "What did the President know and when did he know it?" Accused of sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky, Bill Clinton steadfastly denied any involvement, asserting infamously, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Monica Lewinsky." Had Nixon and Clinton confessed and accepted responsibility for their actions early on, they may have avoided impeachment. Nixon was impeached and resigned. Clinton too was impeached but was acquitted by the Senate and remained in office.

Rather than learn from those examples and come clean, Hillary Clinton is following the same course as Nixon and her husband: denial and dismissal rather than truthful explanation and expressions of remorse for wrong doing. That course invites a very damaging boomerang effect, particularly strong for those stalwarts who believe every word spoken by their candidate.

When official word proceeds to the press of the extent of Hillary Clinton's law violations, her representations that this was nothing more than a "security review" and that she has done nothing wrong will be proven false. She will be viewed as having betrayed those who trusted her, and they will harbor resentment that will either cause them to avoid voting for her in the general election or cause them to vote for her opponent. In this respect, Donald Trump is in the catbird's seat.

No doubt part of Bernie Sanders' interest in competing all the way to the convention lies in his team's understanding that Hillary Clinton's dismissive approach carries with it its own

self-destructive boomerang mechanism. By not engaging the email scandal, Sanders may have astutely allowed Hillary to hang herself. As official word proceeds of Hillary's law violations, Sanders will be there to pick up the slack. Leading Democrats fear Sanders and will no doubt urge Vice President Joe Biden to be the Democrat's savior when Hillary falls from grace.

Although it is difficult to predict how these variables will be sorted out, it is likely that the sense of betrayal will keep Democrats from the polls or cause them to vote for Trump in numbers that may be decisive. All of this will likely come from the fact that Hillary Clinton at the start of her official campaign chose to deny the truth of her law violations rather than admit them and accept responsibility for them.

By taking this dismissive approach, Hillary Clinton is unwittingly courting disaster. Between now and the general election, there will be major news events that follow from FBI Director James Comey's recommendation on a criminal indictment and Attorney General Lynch's action on that recommendation. As those stories reach the public and as Donald Trump capitalizes on them, Hillary Clinton's false narrative will become apparent even to her most ardent supporters.

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