

Hillary and the Liberal Way of Lying

How the Clintons pioneered the methods by which Obama sold his Iran deal.

Sometime in the 1990s I began to understand the Clinton way of lying, and why it was so successful. To you and me, the Clinton lies were statements demonstrably at variance with the truth, and therefore wrong and shameful. But to the initiated they were an invitation to an intoxicating secret knowledge.

What was this knowledge? That the lying was for the greater good, usually to fend off some form of Republican malevolence. What was so intoxicating? That the initiated were smart enough to see through it all. Why be scandalized when they could be amused? Why moralize when they could collude?

It always works. We are hardly a month past [Hillary Clinton](#)'s Server-gate press conference, in which she served up whoppers faster than a Burger King burger flipper—lies large and small, venial and potentially criminal, and all of them quickly found out. Emails to Bill, who never emails? The convenience of one device, despite having more than one device?

It doesn't matter. Now Mrs. Clinton is running for president, and only a simpleton would fail to appreciate that the higher mendacity is a recommendation for the highest office. In the right hands, the thinking goes, lying can be a positive good—as political moisturizer and diplomatic lubricant.

What the Clintons pioneered—the brazen lie, coyly delivered and knowingly accepted—has become something more than the M.O. of one power couple. It has become the liberal way of lying.

Consider this column's favorite subject: the Iran deal. An honest president might sell the current deal roughly as follows.

“My fellow Americans, the deal we have negotiated will not, I am afraid, prevent Iran from getting a bomb, should its leaders decide to build one. And eventually they will. Fatwa or no fatwa, everything we know about their nuclear program tells us it is geared toward building a bomb. And frankly, if you lived in a neighborhood like theirs—70 million Shiites surrounded by hundreds of millions of Sunnis—you'd want a bomb, too.

“Yes, we could, in theory, stop Iran from getting the bomb. Sanctions won't do it. Extreme privation didn't stop Maoist China or Bhutto's Pakistan or Kim's North Korea from building a bomb. It won't stop Iran, either.

“Airstrikes? They would set Iran back by a few years. But even in a best-case scenario, the Iranians would be back at it before long, and they'd keep trying until they got a bomb or we got regime change.

“Fellow Americans, how many of you want to raise your hands for more Mideast regime change?

“So here's the deal with my deal: It never was about cutting off Iran's pathways to a bomb. Let's just say that was an aspiration. It's about managing, and maybe slowing, the process by which they get one.

“I know that's not what you thought I've been saying these past few years—all that stuff about all options being on the table and me not bluffing and no deal being better than a bad deal. I said this for political expedience, or as a way of palliating restive Saudis and Israelis. You feed the dogs their bone.

“But if you’d been listening attentively, you would have heard the qualifier ‘on my watch’ added to my promises that Iran would not get the bomb. And what happens after I leave office? Hopefully, the Supreme Leader will be replaced by a new leader cut from better cloth. Hopefully, too, this marathon diplomacy will open new patterns of U.S.-Iranian cooperation. But if neither thing happens we’d be no worse off than we are today.

“That’s why getting a deal, any deal, is more important than the deal’s particulars when it comes to sanctions relief, inspections protocols and so on. The details only matter insofar as they make the political medicine go down. What counts is that we’re sitting at the table together, speaking.”

A speech along these lines would have the virtues of intellectual integrity and political honesty. It would improve the quality, and perhaps the tenor, of our foreign-policy discussions. The argument might well lose—the U.S. tool kit of coercion is not so bare, the benefit of diplomacy isn’t so great, the threat of a nuclear Iran isn’t so manageable and Americans aren’t that eager to roll over for the ayatollah. But at least we would have a worthwhile debate.

Question for Mrs. Clinton: Does she think the U.S. should gently midwife Iran’s nuclear birth or violently abort it? If she wants to be president, our former top diplomat could honor us with a detailed answer.

In the meantime, let’s simply note what the liberal way of lying has achieved. We are on the cusp of reaching the most consequential foreign-policy decision of our generation. We have a deal whose basic terms neither side can agree on. We have a president whose goals aren’t what he said they were, and whose motives he has kept veiled from the public.

Maybe the ayatollah will give him his deal, and those with the secret knowledge will cheer. As for the rest of us: Haven’t we learned that we’re too stupid to know what’s for our own good?

Write to bstephens@wsj.com April 14, 2015

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/hillary-and-the-liberal-way-of-lying-1428968021?KEYWORDS=Liberal+Way+of+Lying>