

Sunday Forum

Safety rests with Clinton

To preserve stability, Americans will just have to plug their noses and vote for her

Trudy Rubin

Now that the presidential race is truly on, anyone who cares about America's foreign policy and national security has no option but to vote for Hillary Clinton. Even if you don't like her.

The most urgent reason is the need to prevent a mercurial, ill-informed hot head from ever having his hand on the nuclear button. The second reason is that Clinton has a particular skill set that is vital for these unstable times.

Donald Trump has demonstrated over and over again that he doesn't have the temperament to be commander-in-chief. He flies off the handle at criticism and shoots off his mouth with reckless abandon (like his call for Russia to hack and release Clinton's emails).

Many Trump supporters appear to believe he can compensate for his flaws by surrounding himself with foreign policy heavy hitters. But he's failed to do so. Whereas Ronald Reagan, to whom Trump compares himself, had a vast array of foreign policy advisers and a clear ideology when he ran for president, Trump has neither.

Trump has already terrified America's allies and thrilled our adversaries with his talk of dismantling our key alliances with NATO, Japan and South Korea, and his praise for authoritarian regimes like Russia and China. He has suggested ditching an array of treaties that would undercut important international institutions.

Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, speaking last month at the Perry World House at the University of Pennsylvania, tried to imagine the situation if Trump were elected, and could hardly get the words out. "To think that someone like Donald Trump could become president," Panetta said, "and could back off our alliances, could say troops ought to torture, and that we ought to spread nuclear weapons and ban all Muslims — this is crazy."

"He has already jeopardized our national security, has already raised questions about where the United States is and will be."

Having recently returned from Germany and France, where I spoke with government officials and foreign policy experts, I can attest to the bewilderment and shock of our close allies. "He can't possibly win, can he?" was the question I heard everywhere.

Our foreign partners are also bewildered at how eager Trump is to belittle them. After a French priest was murdered by the Islamic State — a tragedy that normally inspires



condolences — Trump shot off: "France is no longer France." French President Francois Hollande angrily retorted, "France will always be France. It never gives up because it still bears ideals, values ... it's when you lower your standards that you are no longer what you are. That's something that may happen to others on the other side of the Atlantic."

Why insult an ally at such a painful moment? That question gets to the heart of why Trump presents such a danger to America's future. Trump appears to believe that America — and he, himself — can go it alone.

Which brings us to Clinton. No one can contest the breadth of her foreign experience, as first lady, senator and secretary of state. She understands the critical need for the United States to maintain its role as a global leader at a time when Western democracies are in turmoil. She grasps — as Trump doesn't — that "Americanism" and "globalism" can't be separated. Prosperity at home requires stability abroad.

Moreover, Clinton recognizes that the global challenge to democracies from Moscow, Beijing, and the Islamic State requires that alliances be solidified, not broken.

Yes, she has made mistakes (who wouldn't have in decades of public service?). Her staffing choices have not always been wise. Her use of a public email server was clearly unwise (although only a few dozen of 30,000 emails examined by the FBI had classified information). The Libya intervention ended poorly

Hillary Clinton, then the U.S. secretary of state, meets with officials from Middle Eastern countries in 2012 to discuss local and global issues including Iran as well as attend talks aimed at ending the violence by Bashar Assad's government toward its citizens in Syria. AP FILE

The Democratic candidate has made clear that, whenever possible, she prefers tough diplomacy to force.

(although the options were all bad).

And the closely held White House foreign policy team left her little space to shape policy during her years as secretary of state. But what came through during her tenure was her toughness when confronting adversaries. In summer 2012, she — along with Panetta, CIA chief David Petraeus and top army brass, wanted to arm moderate Syrian rebels (when they truly existed) as leverage to force Damascus to the bargaining table — a move that might have ended the Syrian conflict. The Obama team refused.

Clinton has taken a firmer stand than Obama toward Russia's hybrid warfare in Ukraine. She has advocated a more forceful effort to end the Islamic State caliphate (without sending U.S. ground

troops). Yet her stance is far different from the reckless Trump rhetoric, which promises to defeat the Islamic State overnight but gives no details. As Clinton ruefully admitted at the Democratic convention, she is a stickler for details.

Of course, this is a bizarre election year — when the isolationist Trump has pulled GOP foreign policy to the left of Obama, and Democrats have taken on the mantle of patriotism. Clinton has the support of retired Gen. John Allen, and other retired brass, and clearly is comfortable dealing with the military. Yet some Americans may fear an activist Clinton foreign policy will pull the country into another conflict.

But the Democratic candidate has made clear that, whenever possible, she prefers tough diplomacy to force. She showed her chops when she maneuvered Europe, Russia, and China into supporting tough sanctions against Iran. The final Iran deal was negotiated after she left office, but she has pledged to hold Iran to every detail.

Trump, on the other hand, wants to junk the deal, which would lead either to an Iranian nuke or another Mideast war.

Indeed, the irony of this election year is that the GOP, which was once the party dedicated to keeping America safe, has put forward a candidate whose temperament would gravely endanger U.S. security. That's why — whether or not you like Clinton — it's so essential that she be elected to the job.

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Kern County needs greater transparency in sex assault cases

David Cohn and Neil Gehlawat

One of the fundamental tenets of democracy is the concept of transparency in government, and it's especially an important topic in this election season.

Unfortunately, for years the County of Kern has attempted to cover up instances of sexual assault and misconduct by county law enforcement personnel.

Government transparency promotes accountability and transforms citizens into public watchdogs. For there to be effective public oversight of government, our citizens must be able to freely access information about the decisions their government makes. This includes the right to know how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent, especially when that money is being used to compensate victims of sexual assault.

Kern County's pattern and practice of insisting on confidential settlements with victims of sexual assault flies in the face of transparency in government. If a county law enforcement official sexually assaults an innocent victim, then we as taxpayers have an absolute right to know about it. We have a right to know how it happened, why it happened, and what, if anything, is being done to ensure that it never happens again.

Confidentiality does nothing to prevent sexual assault from occurring again; it is adverse to public policy and can allow the wrongful conduct to continue. But when the public is made aware of these wrongful acts, and the settlements that follow, it has the effect of exposing sexual predators and lax departmental policies, with the hope that curbing future wrongful conduct will become an obvious priority for the county.

The only part of a settlement in sexual assault cases that should remain confidential is the identity of the victim. Protecting their identities encourages victims to come forward without fear of retaliation or humiliation. Making the settlement terms publicly known while keeping the identity of victims confidential strikes the right balance between open government and protecting the dignity of victims.

The county's well-documented practice of paying "hush money" to victims, however, is far from dignified. Even though county officials in news stories have described this practice as "nothing unusual," and defended it as a "common practice throughout the United States," it is far from common and it is neither morally nor ethically sound. The payment program is an acceptable practice in the context of resolving small claims for property damage, but is far from appropriate in the context of fairly compensating victims of sexual assault. To even suggest that the two are somehow equivalent is demeaning to victims of sexual assault and offensive to our collective sense of public integrity.

Approaching unrepresented victims of sexual misconduct with small stacks of cash at their homes shortly after they have been sexually assaulted is wrong, particularly where the perpetrator and fixer — whom the victim may have come to trust — both hail from the same public entity.

Perhaps more importantly, this practice runs afoul of our commitment to transparency and accountability, because it has the effect of sweeping sexual misconduct under the rug, without the public ever knowing about it.

One county official insisted to local media that confidential settlements have "nothing to do with transparency," and criticized our law firm for being guardians of the public trust. We don't take that as a criticism — we accept it as evidence of our commitment to our community. But instead of bashing attorneys, it would be better to see the County of Kern better protect its citizens.

Kern County supervisors, our elected officials, should put an end to this abhorrent practice. They set the policy, and they alone can stop it.

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Mobilizing mothers against terror

They often are an overlooked but effective resource in the effort to fight violent extremism

Daniel Koehler

When 19-year-old Akhor Saidakhmetov started talking about waging jihad in Syria, his mother took away his passport. Mothers like her may be the first, last and best approach to stopping militant recruiters, but law enforcement often leaves them out of counterterrorism efforts in the U.S. and Europe.

There are three different approaches a country can take against violent extremism and terrorism: prevention, repression and intervention. Mostly, Western countries rely on prevention and repression. And they overlook more targeted deradicalization programs (sometimes called "of-framps") that engage the families of individuals deemed to be falling under the sway of extremist narratives.

In almost all previous attacks by lone actors or members of small terrorist cells, someone in the attackers' social environment recognized a disturbing change in their behavior. Sometimes this relative or friend knew about the attack plans.

Frequently, these families or friends are desperate to get advice on what to do, despite their mixed feelings about betraying a loved one, but law enforcement rarely offers a strategy for making this seem possible. Every country that has introduced a dedicated family counseling hotline and support program has seen these programs overwhelmed with calls and requests for help.

These programs work by reaching out to the gatekeepers — family and close friends. Mothers are essential gatekeepers.

Since studying violent extremism and counterterrorism at university, I have worked to develop deradicalization programs, includ-

ing specially designed family counseling programs for relatives of jihadi fighters. Two years ago, I founded GIRDS, the German Institute for Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies.

Most of the mothers I have worked with who have lost their children to terrorist groups have noticed something changing about their child, but were mostly alone without any outside help. Many parents act on their own, take away passports, lock their children up, or move with them into another town. These reactions are understandable but can be counterproductive.

There is a common saying amongst jihadis: "Allah tests the ones he loves," meaning that any obstacle on the path to martyrdom will be seen as a proof that one is the chosen one. Recruiters and the Salafi-Jihadi ideology explain to those drawn to terrorism that these signs of rejection by their own family are a natural consequence of the perfect truth they have found.

When a mother comes to us, she is assigned a trained case manager. Together, they analyze what is driving their child towards the Islamic State group, and design a step-by-step plan and build support networks around the family. The counselor teaches the family de-escalation techniques and brings in positive alternatives addressing the motives of the child. Does the child want to help women and children in Syria? The mother might suggest that the youth work with a Muslim charity. Also, the mother will get constant risk analysis from the counselor so that she can decide if and when to bring the matter to law enforcement.

To connect mothers to one another, we've built a community called Mothers for Life, which exists mainly online. When we wrote an

open letter to the Islamic State in the summer 2015 and the group responded the same day on Twitter, we knew that they were afraid of the parents' power to block their recruitment efforts. After receiving letters from imprisoned fighters saying they have realized what they did to their own mothers and want to leave jihadism behind, we knew it worked.

Mobilizing mothers fixes another hole in the law enforcement strategy. Parents in the Mothers for Life network say they have lost trust in law enforcement agencies. Sometimes, intelligence and police surveilled their children and did nothing to stop them from leaving. Sometimes, the mothers were treated as terrorists themselves during house searches. At other times, they have even been charged by courts with providing material support to terrorist organizations despite doing everything they could to get their children back. Sometimes, I have to explain to the authorities that families are allies and want to help, that they should be seen as partners, not suspects.

The Islamic State group itself has announced that taking away its territory in Syria and Iraq will not defeat its brand and core ideas. It will shift its strategy to overseas terrorist attacks. That makes it all the more important for Western societies to counter the appeal of the Islamic State and other violent extremist and terrorist organizations. There can be no more effective fighters in that cause than the families and immediate communities of disaffected youths tempted by the perverted promise of martyrdom.

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