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OPINION | COMMENTARY

## What's a Reagan Internationalist to Do?

Unlike Trump, the former secretary of state has an actual record of mistakes and bad judgment in foreign policy.



Hillary Clinton after meeting with national-security experts in New York, Sept. 9. PHOTO: AFP/GETTY IMAGES

By **ROBERT G. KAUFMAN**

Sept. 14, 2016 7:18 p.m. ET

The election of 2016 offers a dismal choice for internationalist foreign-policy conservatives in the Reagan tradition.

Donald Trump has repudiated the main staples of Reagan's moral democratic realism, routinely disdaining the value of alliances with fellow democracies such as NATO, Japan, South Korea and India; advocating conciliation rather than firmness toward an increasingly authoritarian and expansionist Vladimir Putin; and ignoring the gathering military danger of a Chinese tyranny's military buildup aimed at dominating East Asia, the world's most important geopolitical region for the 21st century.

Yet the internationalist conservatives who endorse Hillary Clinton delude themselves if they think things would be better with a President Clinton. As secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton served loyally as President Obama's first mate on his foreign-policy Titanic. And unlike Mr. Trump, Mrs. Clinton has an actual record of mistakes and bad judgment in foreign policy.

Consider:

Hillary Clinton named the ill-fated reset with Mr. Putin, subverting Ukraine's independence and imperiling America's Eastern European NATO allies fearful of becoming Mr. Putin's next target. She also blocked efforts to place the murderous Boko Haram on the State Department's list of international sponsors of terrorism, fostering the Obama administration's fictitious narrative that killing Osama bin Laden had ended the war on terror.

Mrs. Clinton—emblematic of the administration's unwillingness to acknowledge radical Islam as a danger—blamed the attack on the Libyan Embassy on a Coptic Christian video denigrating Islam rather than on the obvious culprits and their Islamist motivations timed for the anniversary of 9/11. She fatuously called Syria's Bashar Assad a reformer with whom we could do business, and she touted the absurd notion that American "smart power" could substitute for American resolve, moral clarity and military might.

Mrs. Clinton remained silent, too, on President Obama's systematic, unwise and dishonorable obsession with putting distance between the U.S. and a democratic Israel while conciliating the worst and most anti-American regimes in international politics. Candidate Clinton still defends an indefensible Iran deal she advocated as secretary of state that puts Iran on the autobahn to crossing the nuclear threshold while tranquilizing Americans to the gathering danger.

Her choice of running mate, Tim Kaine, has the dubious distinction of being in the vanguard of the apologists for an untenable agreement subsidizing a virulently aggressive anti-American Iran while likely triggering a nuclear arms race in the world's most volatile region.

Even after the June terrorist attack in Orlando, Mrs. Clinton could barely utter the words Islamic radicalism, intimating that the weapons rather than the motivations of those wielding them deserved primary blame. That's the equivalent of blaming Pearl Harbor on military aviation rather than the Imperial Japanese regime.

As secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton bears heavy responsibility for the debacle in Libya. She was the administration's leading proponent for American intervention under the auspices of the United Nations, NATO and the Arab League, bypassing the Congress. Libya has become a breeding ground of Islamist terrorism because America's mission was ill-defined and its withdrawal premature.

Nor did Mrs. Clinton resign on principle when Mr. Obama prematurely withdrew from Iraq, failing to negotiate a status of forces agreement that would have retained a sizable American presence—something the president could have achieved had he wanted it. On the contrary, Mrs. Clinton voiced no public objection to Mr. Obama's catastrophic decision precipitating Iraq's collapse, with ISIS and a revolutionary Iran filling the vacuum.

Nor, despite her allegedly private misgivings, did Mrs. Clinton resign on principle or object publicly to Mr. Obama's bungling and vacillating policy toward a Syrian civil war that has metastasized into a murderous, regional and sectarian civil war and a humanitarian refugee crisis wreaking havoc not just the region but also in Europe and the U.S.

The pivot to Asia that then-Secretary of State Clinton unveiled in 2011 has also proved hollow. Like Mr. Obama, Mrs. Clinton has de-emphasized the gathering danger of China's swelling ambitions, defined combating climate change as the priority, and emphasized diplomacy rather than American hard power. The combination of China's military buildup and America's precipitous build-down that Mrs. Clinton backed has increased the apprehension of traditional democratic allies in East Asia as well as India.

A vote for Hillary Clinton is therefore a vote for Mr. Obama's dangerous doctrine, which fears American power more than it fears our enemies. As secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton contributed enormously to lowering the barriers to aggression everywhere—with much worse to come unless we reverse course.

The internationalist conservatives who oppose Mr. Trump on foreign-policy grounds have a point. But they shouldn't fool themselves that they will get something better with Mrs. Clinton.

