

Hard Choices  
Hillary Rodham Clinton

A smoothly written campaign document, glossing over the hard stuff

This is a campaign document. It is smoothly written, generally kind to people still in power who might be helpful. It puts the requisite blame on George W. Bush, but does not go overboard in doing so.

There are no fresh insights to be found in the areas of interest to me. She glosses over relations with Russia and Ukraine, without ever getting into the details of the issues. "Energy," "repression" and the standard lexicon suffice in place of any detailed explanation. I would have been interested in why she thinks NATO is in the interests of Georgia, Ukraine and others, and especially how she thinks that NATO could be effective in resisting Russian aggression in its "near abroad." There is nothing more than refined, erudite Washington words.

She artfully gives credit where it is not due. She credits Obama with the "surge" in Afghanistan, whereas my recollection is that he waffled endlessly until his military convinced him it was the right thing to do. It goes by so quickly, absolutely without explanation, that there is hardly anything to which to take exception.

She uses the term Eurasian, a highly prominent word in Putin's vocabulary, only a couple of times. She is right to say that Putin would like to fence off a very large piece of geography in which Russia happens to be by far the most powerful actor. He claims that the world needs a counterbalance to America and Europe. His true agenda, as she notes, is recreating something in the form of the former Russian/Soviet Empire. With Putin at its center.

Of Maidan, she writes that "Many Ukrainians, especially those living in the capital, Kyiv, and the non-Russian-speaking sections of the country, were inflamed by the about-face. They dreamed of living in a prosperous European democracy, and now they faced the prospect of coming once again under Moscow's thumb." She is half right. Ukraine is not, never has been and does not want to be Russian. On the other hand, there is a cultural affinity. There is fairly widespread appreciation for Putin's stands against Pussy Riot, gay propaganda and immigration. Ukraine, for the most part, has simply wanted to be left alone. It will be interesting to see how the country moves under its widely respected, pro-European new president, Poroschenko, who is not mentioned in a book despite the fact that the grab of Crimea is.

Clinton's take on Latin America and especially Cuba and Chile is strictly party line. She, nor anybody else, can afford to say a good word about anybody on the right. She writes "The role of the United States in the 1973 coup that brought Pinochet to power and our support for his right-wing regime is a dark chapter in our involvement in the region, but our more recent relationship was strong and productive. Michelle Bachelet, elected in 2006 as Chile's first woman President, was trained as a pediatrician..." The fact is that Chile, like all the Southern Cone, was beset by Marxist guerillas during

the 1970s. Chile's MIR faction was especially nasty. They played a role in communist Salvador Allende's election (in a democratic process, but by a distinct minority) in 1970. Allende was not effective, and the right, incensed by the electoral loss and increasing chaos, took over in a CIA supported coup. Pinochet then suppressed the guerillas in a dirty war, put the economy on its feet, and voluntarily stepped aside in favor of a new president in elections which he himself organized. Picking up the story, as Clinton notes, the current President, Bachelet, is a successor to that process inaugurated by Pinochet. True, he has the blood of perhaps 3,000 leftists on his hands, leftists whose own hands were already quite bloody. The question that nobody even asks is whether there has ever been a leftist dictator who left a better legacy? Or even left power voluntarily?

Clinton supports the party platform with regard to climate change. " The problems posed by global warming were evident, despite the deniers. There was a mountain of overwhelming scientific data about the damaging effects of carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases. Thirteen of the top fourteen warmest years on record have all come since 2000. The claim of 13 out of 14 is one that I have not seen elsewhere. A search of the book does not yield a single reference to the IPCC, the UN panel driving the climate change argument, but even they are chagrined that there has not been much measured change over the past couple of decades.

She airily writes that "...we offered plans to curb emissions, improve energy efficiency, and develop clean energy technologies" without reference to what would amount to hard choices, such as raising the price of gasoline, and without reference to scandals such as Solyndra.

That's my take on the book. It is a campaign document, very professionally produced, designed not so much to enlighten as to persuade. My bet is that it will succeed.