

The Times' Kristof dissembles in defense of Clinton's 'honesty'

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New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof departed Sunday from his usual beat, providing “human rights” justifications for Washington’s wars and military provocations around the world, to publish a thoroughly cynical and dishonest defense of Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton under the headline, “Debunking the ‘Crooked Hillary’ Myth.”

Kristof exudes moral self-righteousness when he is denouncing governments and leaders targeted by the United States for invasion and regime-change. He has enthusiastically backed the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria as well as Washington’s aggressive moves against Russia and China. He is part of the faction of liberal war-mongers who criticize the Obama administration for failing to sufficiently escalate the war to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

But when it comes to Hillary Clinton’s notoriously corrupt relations with Wall Street, the arch-hypocrite Kristof drops his sanctimonious façade and employs sophistries and lies to dismiss as a “myth” what millions perceive to be bribery on a grand scale.

In his column, Kristof lays out the problem Clinton, the Democratic Party establishment and their media mouthpieces in the *Times* confront. After her solid win in last week’s New York primary, Clinton has all but defeated Bernie Sanders and secured the Democratic nomination.

“But,” he writes, “Clinton’s challenge is the trust issue: The share of voters who have negative feelings toward her has soared... only a bit more than one-third of American voters regard Clinton as ‘honest and trustworthy.’”

“Indeed, when Gallup asks Americans to say the first word that comes to mind when they hear ‘Hillary Clinton,’ the most common response can be summed up as ‘dishonest/liar/don’t trust her/poor character.’ Another common category is ‘criminal/crooked/thief/belongs in jail.’”

He continues, “All this is, I think, a mistaken narrative.”

Kristof then offers the following extraordinary argument: “Even false narratives can take on a life of their own because *there is always information arriving that can confirm the narrative.*” [Emphasis added]

In other words, “Don’t be misled by the facts!”

He goes on to cite a report from a fact-checking web site that, of Clinton’s campaign stump statements it has checked, “95 percent are either true or mostly true,” supposedly making Clinton “far more honest and trustworthy than her peers.”

Kristof acknowledges that Clinton can be “infuriatingly evasive,” but “that’s because she’s more hawkish than some Democrats,” and “she realizes she’s likely to face general election voters in November and is preserving wiggle room so she can veer back to the center then.”

This is not meant as a criticism. Kristof is entirely sympathetic to Clinton’s need to conceal from Democratic primary voters her militaristic intentions, which could quickly lead in a Hillary Clinton administration to war with nuclear-armed Russia or China and a nuclear world war. Nor is he in the least disturbed that Clinton is preparing to drop her populist façade and run in the general election as the candidate of the financial aristocracy, the CIA and the Pentagon.

There is nothing dishonest, in Kristof’s book, about lying to the population to get elected. “That’s what presidents do,” he writes, thereby acknowledging in his cynical fashion the corrupt and anti-democratic character of the entire political system.

Further on, he cites as an authority on Clinton’s character Jill Abramson, who told the *Guardian* that Clinton is “fundamentally honest and trustworthy.” He neglects to mention that Abramson is a former executive editor of the *Times*.

When he comes to Clinton’s obscene speaking fees from Wall Street financial firms, Kristof gives no facts,

brushing quickly over her “raking in” of “hundreds of thousands of dollars from speeches to Goldman Sachs and other companies.”

“There’s no sign,” he declares, “of any quid pro quo,” and adds, “In a broader sense, companies write checks to buy access and influence, but if that’s corrupt then so is our entire campaign finance system.” Precisely! And Kristof, a staunch defender of American capitalism, earns his ample paycheck by providing apologetics for this cesspool of fraud and bribery.

Kristof belittles “the information arriving that can confirm the narrative” for good reason. The evidence of corrupt relations between Hillary and Bill Clinton and the financial oligarchy is massive and damning. Never before in American history have a president and first lady so shamelessly and brazenly cashed in on their stint in the White House to make themselves filthy rich. American politics has been corrupt for a very long time, but there is no precedent for this level of venality.

Sanders, who has made an issue of Clinton’s Wall Street speaking fees, has barely scratched the surface in his campaign statements on the issue.

The pattern was already set during their Arkansas years, when the Clintons established close ties to Walmart (the Walton family) and Frank Perdue of the chicken empire. But this was small potatoes compared to what followed their departure from the White House.

According to CNN, Hillary and Bill Clinton combined to take in more than \$153 million in paid speeches from 2001 until Hillary Clinton launched her presidential campaign in May of 2015. Between February 2001 and May 2015, the two gave 729 speeches and received an average fee of \$210,795 per speech. Of that sum, at least \$7.7 million came from major banks.

While Hillary Clinton was Obama’s secretary of state, her former president husband delivered 215 paid speeches around the world and took in \$48 million for the Clinton Foundation and other family interests. Of that, \$17 million came from talks to banks, insurance companies, hedge funds, real estate businesses and other financial firms.

In the two years between her 2013 exit from the State Department and the launch of her current presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton gave 12 speeches to Wall Street banks, private equity firms and other financial corporations, receiving a total of \$2,935,000. The firms include Bank of America, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and UBS.

Her best year on the bank circuit was 2013, right after she left the State Department. That year she received \$2.3 million for three speeches to Goldman Sachs and individual speeches to seven other major Wall Street firms.

Then there is the Clinton Foundation. In 2014 its assets totaled \$439 million. Through that year, the foundation, which does not reveal its donors, had raised almost \$2 billion from US corporations, especially Wall Street firms, as well as foreign governments and corporations, political donors, and other moneyed interests.

The one year the foundation did release a list of its donors, 2008, the roll call included the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Blackwater Worldwide.

As for Kristof’s claim that “there is no sign of any quid pro quo,” one need only mention the bills President Bill Clinton backed and signed into law abolishing virtually all that remained of 1930s bank regulations and blocking any regulation of hedge funds or derivatives. For her part, Hillary Clinton voted for the October 2008 bill establishing the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program to bail out the big banks.

The Clinton’s corruption is significant not solely for what it says about them personally, but for what it says about the political system in general and the Democratic Party in particular. This party, which the so-called “socialist” Sanders claims can be reformed, is an instrument of Wall Street, the military and the CIA. Beyond the financial aristocracy, its main social base is the privileged and complacent upper-middle class for whom the *Times* and its pro-imperialist, pro-war liberals such as Kristof speak.



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