

Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes's *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign*

# The Democratic Convention, anti-Russian hysteria, and Clinton's concession

## Part Two

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Part One of this review of *Shattered* followed the Democratic Party primary elections from 2015 through mid-2016. Part Two traces the Clinton and Sanders campaigns from the Democratic National Convention to the November election.

he could support it without locking Hillary into detailed promises on policy."

Both campaigns were deeply concerned over the prospect of an explosion of opposition on the floor of the convention hall. The following passages are worth quoting in full:

### Sanders and Clinton at the Convention

*Shattered* provides details of the collaboration between the Clinton and Sanders campaigns and the Obama White House, which expose the Vermont senator's political cowardice and the thuggery and corruption of the Democratic Party leadership. Sanders's performance at the convention confirms his role in preventing masses of workers and youth with a growing interest in socialism from breaking with the Democratic Party.

Obama personally met with Sanders after his defeat in the California primary and urged him to end his campaign and support Clinton. Sanders "irritated" Obama, according to the authors, and the president "could be heard grumbling about" comparisons between his own 2008 campaign and Sanders's 2016 run. Obama "seldom failed to let his annoyance show."

During their meeting, Obama said "he didn't want Democrats to lose what Bernie had brought to the table—and not just because he wanted Hillary to win. Obama and Sanders shared a capacity to bring more people into the political system. The two men spent some of their hour-long meeting brainstorming ways that the Democratic Party could sustain the energy of Bernie's campaign both in the election and in helping to move public policy debates with grassroots engagement."

The Democratic Party used Sanders to "bring more people into the political system"—i.e., to turn them into the Democratic Party and away from socialism. During the convention, Sanders's main goal was suppressing opposition among his own delegation to Clinton's nomination.

"Bernie and his top aides softened," Allen and Parnes write, but "his supporters didn't always follow suit. 'They were trying to get their people in line,' one Hillary source said."

During discussion on the party platform, "Many of [Sanders's] supporters were furious with each loss in the development of the program. ... In the end, the platform threw enough vague concessions to Bernie that

There was good reason for them to fear a full-scale revolt from Bernie's delegates. The platform talks had demonstrated goodwill on the part of Bernie and his top aides, but they'd also shown just how recalcitrant many of his supporters remained. Both sides knew that Bernie didn't really control them, and that meant they could sow chaos inside the hall and on television screens across the country. Heading into Monday, July 25, the first day of the convention, [Clinton campaign manager Robert] Mook was nervous. 'Absolutely shitting my pants' is how he described it to others.

With his own speech scheduled for that night, Sanders sent a text message to his delegates imploring them to behave themselves on the floor. 'I ask you as a personal courtesy to me not to engage in any kind of protest on the floor,' he wrote. By this point, he had a lot of skin in the game. If he was seen as failing to unify a party that he had helped divide during the primary, his reputation would be permanently damaged. That didn't matter to his diehards.

When Bernie delivered a speech to his delegates in a ballroom at the nearby Philadelphia Convention Center, they booed lustily when he spoke of his rival. Mook lost his temper. He picked up his phone and dialed [Sanders senior aide Jeff] Weaver. 'What the fuck are you doing?' Mook demanded. But Weaver wasn't doing anything.

The two campaign managers' worst fears were being realized. There was a segment of Bernie's constituency that was so angry they couldn't even stand silently by when he talked about his support for Hillary—and the television news cameras had a knack for giving every last dead-ender his or her moment of fame.

The convention, they knew, could turn sideways fast. Fortunately for Hillary, for Bernie, and for the Democratic Party, Mook and Weaver had a contingency plan. About a week before the convention, they had put together a joint command operation behind the arena's main stage. The boiler room, a big open space

filled with long tables, folding chairs, and telephones, functioned as a nerve center from which the two camps could exert control over their delegates during the four-day program. On one side sat an office for Clinton's senior staff and on the other a matching space for Bernie's top advisers. The phones, staffed by a mix of Hillary and Bernie aides, connected directly to phones on the convention floor designated for each state's delegation. The big unions, which had been divided in the primaries but would support the Democratic nominee, had their own whip operation humming nearby.

The boiler room proved a physical nexus for the Bernie and Hillary brain trusts, but an electronic connection kept them in sync throughout the convention hall. The two teams created a text messaging distribution list that allowed for constant communication about potential problems during the four-day convention. When a Bernie supporter raised an anti-Clinton sign, a whip team member in the convention hall could relay the message quickly to the boiler room.

Throughout [Clinton's] speech, pockets of die-hard Bernie backers screamed slogans at the stage. Each time, the joint Clinton-Sanders whip team jumped into action, and chants of 'U-S-A' drowned out the dissidents. Recalcitrant Bernie supporters who left the hall to get a soda or go to the bathroom found that their seats had been occupied by pro-Clinton forces when they returned. Schwerin, Rooney, and Sullivan had tailored the speech with the aim of including a lot of applause lines, fearful that any lulls would encourage outbursts from the pro-Bernie delegates. They had reassured Hillary that there would be plenty of cheering to cover up any dissent. It turned out to be a prescient concern. The interruptions were more disruptive in the hall than they seemed at home, and several of Hillary's longtime advisers said that the cadence of her delivery was thrown off.

Ultimately, Clinton's nomination was secured: "Mook was most keenly aware of the optical illusion the two camps had pulled off, as he revealed to friends in a story he would tell later. During the convention, a woman approached him and said that the American flags in the arena were beautiful. That was to hide the crazy people shouting things, he thought. But it looked great. Similarly, the campaign looked a lot better in front of the curtain than behind it."

These passages convey not only the deeply anti-democratic character of the Democratic Party, but also the degree to which the policy decisions of the ruling class are influenced by their profound fear that social opposition will break free from the confines of the Democratic Party and trade unions.

In this framework, Sanders's conscious role in shoring up support for the Democratic Party exposes the right-wing character of the American pseudo-left, which supported Sanders and thereby provided a left cover for Sanders's efforts to block an independent movement of the working class from developing outside the control of the two main capitalist parties.

Throughout 2016, groups like the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative credited Sanders as responsible for creating a left-wing challenge to what they call the "establishment" wing of the Democratic Party.

In May 2015, these groups were joined by other pseudo-left organizations at the Left-Elect Conference in Chicago. At the time, Socialist Alternative published a letter distributed to conference attendees and signed by Sanders himself.

"Dear Friends in Chicago," the letter began, reading, in part: "I strongly believe your efforts in Chicago this weekend and back home are still very

much complementary to the national electoral campaign that I just announced this week. And I hope that this spirit of cooperation reflected in your meeting agenda will extend to our mutual ability to work together, now and in the future."

This letter implicates the pseudo-left as co-conspirators in Sanders' efforts to provide the Democratic Party with a phony "left" veneer. It was this thread of a common "spirit of cooperation" that linked them through the Sanders campaign to the Democratic Party's efforts to secure electoral victory in 2016.

## The general election

The sections of *Shattered* that relate to the general election portray a campaign blinded by its own arrogance that ignored repeated warnings of impending crisis. From the structure of the book, which devotes far more attention to the primary than to the general election, it is evident that the authors shared the conviction of the Clinton camp that the contest with Sanders had been the "real" election—like the Obama-Clinton primary struggle in 2008—and that the general election campaign against a reactionary and unpopular Republican billionaire was merely an afterthought.

Clinton's campaign felt that Sanders had wounded her campaign by portraying her as "conspiring with Wall Street types to rig the system against the little guy." Meanwhile, Clinton set out to raise extraordinary amounts of money from the financial aristocracy to fund a general election campaign based largely on television advertising.

Hillary mingled with old friends in Sag Harbor under a tent on the night of August 30: Calvin Klein, Harvey Weinstein, Jimmy Buffett, Jon Bon Jovi, and Sir Paul McCartney. Buffett and his wife, Jane, were the hosts of this extravaganza, which capped a multiday fund-raising blitz through the Hamptons. For a minimum of \$100,000, VIPs were treated to dinner, 'premium seating,' and the option to dance the night away with Hillary, Bill, and a few of their A-list pals. Hillary put on a brave face, reveled with her donors, and even joined in singing 'Hey Jude.'

While she was singing for the oligarchy's money, Clinton relied on Sanders for public legitimacy: "To court the younger set, Hillary turned to an old rival who had inflicted great damage on her campaign: Bernie Sanders."

Sanders "was happy to keep his promise to do whatever he could to help Hillary," the authors write. When Sanders recorded a video urging his supporters to vote for Clinton, Clinton's campaign demanded that Sanders remove a graph from the video which depicted the minimum wage rising to \$15 an hour. Clinton's team demanded the graph "should only go up to \$12 an hour, not \$15 an hour. ... Bernie's team executed."

She also oriented toward winning support among the Republican establishment while she continued her identity-based strategy from the Democratic primaries. As for working class voters, and particularly white workers, Clinton's campaign "was giving up on persuading voters who weren't inclined to support Hillary because it was less efficient to go after them." In other words, they spent their money elsewhere.

The other element of Clinton's general election strategy relied on whipping-up anti-Russian sentiment to paint Trump as an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was aimed above all at laying the basis for a planned foreign policy shift targeting Russia. On October 7, when the US military-intelligence apparatus announced—without providing any proof—that the Russian government was responsible for hacking Democratic Party servers, the Clinton campaign was prepared. In the chapter titled "Red October," Allen and Parnes write:

Putin might not be a Communist anymore, but he was a Russian autocrat who came to power after a distinguished career in the KGB. This was the kind of spy-thriller shit that would surely break through in the press. If the public saw Trump putting Russian interests above American sovereignty, Hillary's aides thought, the story had the potential to break his back. After all, in the Red Scare days, Republicans had portrayed liberal Democrats as un-American in unflinching terms.

Several key Clinton aides "jumped on a conference call" to respond by attacking Trump for making "apologies for the Russians."

This McCarthyite formula was to be the basis of the Democratic Party's opposition to Trump, both before and after the election.

*Shattered* also explains Clinton's hostility to then-FBI Director James Comey's decision to announce the FBI was reopening its investigation into Clinton's e-mails. Her campaign was deeply frustrated with the fact that the Russia "narrative" was sidetracked by the October release by Wikileaks of Clinton's Wall Street speeches, plus internal communications detailing broader Clinton corruption.

When election results came in, giving Trump narrow wins in the industrial states of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, despite losing by a wide margin in the popular vote, both the Democrats and Republicans were shocked. The Republican Party had withheld publishing favorable internal polling data because they simply didn't believe data showing Trump could win.

### **The concession speech and anti-Russian hysteria**

*Shattered* includes details as to how the White House and Clinton campaign conceded the election, despite a widespread desire on the part of her closest aides to challenge the results. The conversations that took place between Obama and Clinton on election night convey the fragility of the ruling apparatus. The ruling class was fearful that any sign of opposition from Clinton to Trump's victory would have provoked mass protests that could have spiraled out of control.

*Shattered* reveals that on election night, many Clinton aides were prepared to launch a legal fight to challenge the legitimacy of the outcome. The results showed that the race was very close in several states, and the campaign wanted to wait another day to see whether key races tightened and whether the margin of Clinton's popular vote advantage would widen.

In stepped Barack Obama, with all the power of the military and intelligence agencies behind him. First, an Obama aide called Clinton campaign manager Mook: "We can't drag this out. The president doesn't think it's wise."

When Mook passed Obama's message on to Clinton, she said she understood, but added, "I'm not ready to go give this speech."

Then, Obama called her personally. "The White House had been worried that Hillary might leave it all up in the air," Allen and Parnes write. Obama told Clinton in no uncertain terms: "You need to concede."

Many of Clinton's aides were urging her to fight the election result, but Obama pressed her further to concede. In a fluke of tied-up phone lines, the Clinton campaign could not reach the Trump campaign to formally concede. In these confused minutes, Clinton's top supporters begged her to fight the results.

But, Allen and Parnes explain, "Obama was determined to make sure his friend understood that the election was over. It's done, he said.

Realize that. Deal with it with dignity and move on. After Trump had questioned the legitimacy of the election, the last thing Obama wanted was for Hillary to reinforce that message. As president, it was his job to safeguard the integrity of the political process. ... He didn't see any point in prolonging the inevitable. It wasn't a question of when she would give a concession speech but rather of making sure that she didn't try to turn the election into a recount mess. Turning around and playing Trump's game of questioning the institutions of American democracy wouldn't be good for the country, he said. With his message now delivered to Hillary, Mook, and Podesta, the president hung up."

Clinton conceded, but the vote in the key industrial states continued to tighten, and Clinton began to rack up an overwhelming margin in the popular vote. One aide told Allen and Parnes: "Had anybody known that night, no one would have conceded."

She toned down her concession speech, eliminating statements of opposition to Trump. Clinton said these remarks were "tone-deaf," "too charged," and "too political." She was concerned "she could unintentionally incite supporters who despised Trump."

These are striking admissions. The ruling class is deeply conscious that it lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the broad masses of the population.

Clinton's response to the election further demonstrates how the political establishment sought to divert anti-Trump sentiment in an anti-Russian direction, aimed at advancing the interests of US imperialism. Just hours after Clinton conceded, her campaign quickly spun a narrative aimed at blaming the Russian government, launching unsupported claims that Russia leaked copies of Clinton's corrupt Wall Street speeches to Wikileaks.

"Hillary kept pointing her finger at [FBI Director James] Comey and Russia," Allen and Parnes note. They cite a close Clinton aide: "She wants to make sure all these narratives get spun the right way."

The campaign conceived a strategy for spreading the anti-Russia narrative "within twenty-four hours of her concession speech. Mook and Podesta assembled her communications team at the Brooklyn headquarters to engineer the case that the election wasn't entirely on the up-and-up. For a couple of hours, with Shake Shack containers littering the room, they went over the script they would pitch to the press and the public. Already, Russian hacking was the centerpiece of the argument." In the days that followed, "her team coalesced around the idea that Russian hacking was the major unreported story of the campaign, overshadowed by the contents of stolen e-mails and Hillary's own private server imbroglio."

The anti-Russia narrative did not emerge out of Clinton's head simply as a defensive cover for her own electoral catastrophe. Working with her allies from the State Department and the military-intelligence apparatus, a powerful section of the American ruling class elevated Russia's alleged role as a mechanism to tamper social opposition, taint broad anti-Trump sentiment with the poison of American nationalism, and advance the anti-Russian agenda of US imperialism.

This narrative has become the Democratic Party's sole method for opposing Trump in his first months of office. Rather than any appeal to the mounting opposition to Trump's right-wing rampage against democratic rights, social programs, environmental programs and immigrants, or his militaristic posturing, the Democrats have appealed to sections of the military-intelligence apparatus and the media wedded to the Obama administration's policy of encircling Russia.



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