

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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War aid cash was enemy bonanza

'If you were in Afghanistan, I could help you.'

America spent more on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars than on World War II, in inflation-adjusted dollars. Here's another jaw-dropper. America's nation-building aid to Afghanistan was larger than the money spent in the Marshall Plan, which rebuilt Europe following World War II.

When congressional investigators or journalists look into where that mountain of cash went, the answer often has led to theft that created private fortunes. If there is an overriding object lesson in all of these stories, it is that boatloads of cash, loosely controlled, will lead to theft, especially in a corruption-based culture such as Afghanistan.

It appears that American aid money fueled American enemies, the Taliban. That is the story ("The Bidding War") that Mattheu Aikins has written in the current edition of *The New Yorker*.

Aikins' story involves an Afghan trucking contractor who apparently skimmed millions, with the help of American servicemen. The culpable GIs have been prosecuted and sentenced.

Writes Aikins: "Within the U.S. government, there is growing recognition that

Petro jobs go away

Oil and gas booms and busts have been jerking communities around for more than a century. The Pacific Northwest can thank community skepticism for avoiding damage in the implosion in the petroleum industry.

The *Portland Tribune* reported Tuesday that the Pembina Pipeline Corp. has killed plans for a propane terminal in Portland that would have shipped Canadian propane to China via rail and ships. Pembina, the Port of Portland the Portland Business Alliance objected to a \$6.2 million climate charge proposed by the city's planning commission.

Earlier this year, two proposed oil-by-rail terminal projects collapsed under the weight of their own overly optimistic projections — one on Grays Harbor, Wash., and the other near Clatskanie.

Other plans remain alive to use Oregon and Washington communities and ports as leaping stones between Asian markets and the Bakken oil for-

America's vast expenditures in Afghanistan have been self-defeating, and that the conflict is more complex than simply fighting the Taliban or terrorism."

An Afghan contractor Gul Agha Sherzai told Aikins: "The American money was benefiting everybody — the government and the Taliban."

All of this has relevance to our small communities. We forget the displacement created by the vast military expenditure on those two wars. They crowded out domestic spending.

During that period, the organizers of the drive to restore the Chinook School brought then-Congressman Brian Baird to see their project. At the end of the tour, Baird stood in the gymnasium and told his constituents: "If you were in Afghanistan, I could help you."

mation of Montana, North Dakota, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

In the meantime, the oil bust is playing out in production and refining areas all around the world. Spikes created by energy booms leave epic economic hangovers when they inevitably fade.

Booms and busts are intrinsic to this industry. It may even be said that the overall arc of fossil fuel exploitation is heading for a similar end. In Monday's edition of the *Washington Post*, a columnist argues "The car century was a mistake. It's time to move on." See tinyurl.com/CarCentury. Most of us aren't prepared to share his view, but it's becoming obvious to all but the most bullheaded that it's time to wean ourselves from fossil fuels.

Smart states and communities will resist the false promises of petroleum. While they won't see a boom in oil terminal jobs, they won't be stuck with costs when the inevitable bust happens.

Hillary's moment in time

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

You can look at Hillary Clinton's path to this juncture and marvel at how difficult she has often made things for herself, creating messes where there didn't need to be any, frittering away advantages, misunderstanding the mood of voters, underestimating the mettle of opponents, and failing to cement an image — and a message — that seemed authentic and right.

That's a legitimate perspective. She's a deeply flawed politician.

But she's also a preternaturally determined, resourceful and patient one. Her path illustrates that just as compellingly. For about a quarter of a century, she has been vilified as loudly as she has been lionized, told that her talents pale beside her husband's, called "likable enough" but seldom lovable, and cast in supporting roles: the first lady, the secretary of state.

She never retreated. Never gave up.

And as the returns from Super Tuesday came in, nudging her closer to the Democratic nomination, I realized that we weren't just seeing greater clarity in a messy race for the White House and the possible approach of history: a first-ever major-party female presidential nominee.

We were seeing the vindication of a fortitude and fierceness that warrant as much notice as her less savory qualities.

She notched important wins Tuesday in Massachusetts, Texas, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Arkansas and Alabama, echoing her triumph in South Carolina on Saturday.

Let's give her this moment, because she fought her way here. She tuned out the naysayers. She turned a blind eye to all her scars. Her ability to do that may reflect unrestrained ambition, a sturdy confidence in her mission or — more likely — an intricate cat's cradle of

both. Whichever the case, it demonstrates a grit that could be her greatest asset in a general election.

But grit won't be enough.

The surprising, impressive success of Sanders, who had his own key wins Tuesday, has made that clear. There's an ire and a disgust in the body politic — they fuel his campaign just as they do Donald Trump's — and they're built on a belief that the system is rigged, the status quo is unacceptable and its guardians are untrustworthy.

Clinton is poorly positioned to mollify that rage, and the reason isn't just coziness with Wall Street. It's her familiarity, her celebrity, her crowd. She's political royalty, and she can put the crown deep in a closet; she can renounce it all she wants. There are voters who will still see it there.

And oh, the baggage she carries! Many more Americans have an unfavorable impression of her than a favorable one: In a Quinnipiac University poll from early February, the split was 56 to 39 percent.

She conquers that ... how? By introducing herself better to voters? They know her plenty well. By unveiling yet another new image? It's hard to imagine there are any permutations left.

Democrats are aware of that, and have consoled themselves by focusing on who her Republican opponent might be: Trump. He racked up victory after victory on Tuesday, and Clinton's remarks at a celebratory rally in Miami on Tuesday night were a targeted rebuke of him.

Mocking his slogan, she said that the country's challenge was "not to make America great again. America never stopped being great. We have to make America whole."

She added: "Instead of building walls, we're going to break down barriers."

Trump, at his own victory party, was more explicit and more derisive in his invocations of her. Referring repeatedly to the ongoing investigation of her email practices as sec-



Frank Bruni

retary of state, he said that he'd be surprised if she were even allowed to remain in the presidential race.

He argued that she can't credibly promise America any progress or solutions, given that she's been involved in politics for decades and, in his estimation, has never delivered.

"You look at her record as secretary of state — it's abysmal," he said in a voice dripping with contempt, adding that it would be easy to defeat her and he relished the thought of her as an adversary.

To attain the presidency, a politician needn't be adored — just less loathed than the alternative.

In that same Quinnipiac poll, Trump's unfavorable to favorable ratio was even worse than Clinton's: 59 to 34 percent. Her supporters and advisers are accordingly crafting a strategy of brutal negativity and relentless attacks, as *The New York Times* reported earlier this week. Envisioning that, David Plouffe, who managed Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, said that a Clinton bid would be less "hope and change" than "hate and castrate."

There are several problems with "hate and castrate." One is that Trump already dwells in the sewer and most voters know it; to join him there isn't to expose him but to degrade yourself.

Another is that it doesn't address the ire I mentioned earlier, the yearning to rebel. And a disappointed Sanders voter with that yearning could, in a general election, sit on the sidelines or vote for Trump before siding with Clinton, unless she makes some adjustments defter than any that she has made so far.

Worst of all, an epically nasty general-election campaign would do nothing to unite the country and give the next president much of a chance of governing effectively.

Clinton has the toughness to engage in — and survive — a brutally ugly contest. She also has the smarts to know the cost of it. Has she honed the character and nimbleness to prevail in a more inspiring, unifying way?

As well as we know her, this is yet to be revealed.

Our politics aren't keeping up

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
New York Times News Service

When the U.S. military trains fighter pilots, it uses a concept called the OODA loop. It stands for observe, orient, decide, act. The idea is that if your ability to observe, orient, decide and act in a dogfight at 30,000 feet is faster than the other pilot's, you'll shoot his plane out of the sky. If the other pilot's OODA loop is faster, he'll shoot you out of the sky. For a while now, it's been obvious that our national OODA loop is broken — and it couldn't be happening at a worse time.

Our OODA loop is busted right when the three largest forces on the planet — technology, globalization and climate change — are in simultaneous non-linear acceleration. Climate change is intensifying. Technology is making everything faster and amplifying every voice. And globalization is making the world more interdependent than ever, so we are impacted by others more than ever.

These accelerations are raising all the requirements for the American dream — they are raising the skill level and lifelong learning requirements for every good job; they are raising the bar on governance, the speed at which governments need to make decisions and the need for hybrid solutions that produce both stronger safety nets and more entrepreneurship to spawn more good jobs. They are also raising the bar on leadership, requiring leaders who can navigate this complexity and foster a resilient country.

My own view is that these three accelerations have begun blowing up weak states — see parts of the Middle East and Africa — and they're

just beginning to blow up the politics of strong states. You can see it in America, Britain and Europe. The challenges posed by these accelerations, and what will be required to produce resilient citizens and communities, are forcing a politics that is much more of a hybrid of left and right.

It is the kind of politics you already see practiced in successful communities and towns in America — places like Minneapolis; Austin, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Portland, Oregon — where coalitions made up of the business community, educators and local government come together to forge hybrid solutions to improve their competitiveness and resilience. Unfortunately, we can't get there at the national level since: one of our two major parties has gone nuts and we have designed paralysis into our politics.

Deny climate change. Spurn immigration reform. Shut down the Congress.

The Republican Party fell into the grip of a coalition of far-right media and money people who have created a closed loop of incentives for bad behavior and never getting to hybrid: Deny climate change. Spurn immigration reform. Shut down the Congress. Block Obamacare (even though it was based on an idea first implemented by a Republican governor). Do so, and you get rewarded by Fox TV and the GOP cash machine. Stray from those principles, and you get purged.

That purging eventually produced a collection of Republican presidential candidates who, when they gathered on stage for their first debate, resembled nothing more than the "Star Wars" bar scene at The Mos Eisley Cantina on the remote planet of Tatooine — that assortment of alien species, each more bizarre than the next, from a "galaxy far, far away."

At the same time, as political scientist Gidi Grinstein points out, at the national level, because of the way congressional districts have been ger-



Thomas L. Friedman

rymandered by both parties to produce either more liberal Democrats or more conservative Republicans, we've shifted to a system that nationally incentivizes polarization and prevents hybrid solutions. America, argues Grinstein, is making itself "structurally polarized at the national level and therefore collectively stupid."

We have major issues that Congress needs to resolve via politics, and the failure to do so will really hurt us: How do we balance privacy and security? How do we expand free trade and cushion our workers hurt from the effects? How do we make the fixes in Obamacare to make it more sustainable? These will all require hybrid compromises, not dogmatism.

The guy who actually understands this is President Barack Obama. He's never been as strong on entrepreneurship as I would like, but he's also never been the radical lefty the GOP invented. His instinct has been to go hybrid — to combine support for free trade and immigration, to implement a Common Core to upgrade education, to provide health care so workers can be more mobile, to fund more Pell grants so more students can afford college, to make investments in clean tech, to make changes in the tax code to narrow income gaps — all to make the country more resilient. We could have done so much more with his presidency.

What is it fascinating about Donald Trump is that he is blowing up the Republican Party by offering a totally new hybrid politics. In that regard he is a pioneer — socially liberal in some ways, isolationist in others. He is almost Democratic in his approach to Social Security, yet he is anti-immigrant, bigoted and fear-mongering in other ways. And he is positively irresponsible in his budget proposals. His hybrid is an incoherent mess, more designed to appeal to the GOP base than to govern. But if Trump uses it to explode this Republican Party and to open the way for a new, mature, hybrid center-right version, he will have done the Lord's work.

But please, Lord, keep him away from the White House.