

COACHING *for* LEADERS

Tough Love: My Story of Things Worth Fighting For

by Susan Rice

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Dave's Reading Highlights

In those early days, it was hard to grasp the depth and force of the reaction to my appearances. It was harder still to imagine that it would endure, not only through the entirety of the 2012 presidential campaign, but long thereafter. I became a household name and the poster child for bilious Obama-haters on Fox and in right-wing social media. For months, it was relentless. And though it ebbed, it has never ended.

Ever since my name became synonymous with Benghazi, I have wanted to tell my story. Almost overnight, I went from being a respected if relatively low-profile cabinet official to a nationally notorious villain or heroine, depending on one's political perspective and what cable news channel you watch. I am neither. The portrayals of me on both sides are superficial and uninformed by who I am and where I come from, by what motivates and truly defines me. I could not tell my own story—until I left government. When I was a senior official who spoke publicly, I was speaking on behalf of the United States of America and our president. For the five years after Benghazi until I returned to private life, I was compelled to allow myself to be defined by others—something I never had to do before or otherwise would have tolerated. It's hard to convey how frustrating that feels, especially when the public portrayal is false or demeaning. Now I am

free to not only tell my own story but also what I have learned over the course of my life in service.

Their intense arguments, peppered with “God dammits!” and pithy ad hominem zingers, were about all manner of issues, particularly race and politics. Hearing their raucous debates taught me the merits of fierce, often cocky contention. Arguing with a firm command of the facts, combined with dead certainty, whether feigned or real, I would discover, was an effective means of besting your opponent. My elders’ bull sessions, along with constant debates at the dinner table, bequeathed me an early comfort with verbal combat and a relish for righteous battle. Raised not to fear a fight or shy away from advocating for a worthy cause, this aspect of my upbringing often (but not always) served me well in later years—whether on political campaigns, in policy debates, or during difficult negotiations with foreign adversaries.

I internalized Dad’s message that I should never doubt my own abilities. This combination—being a confident black woman who is not seeking permission or affirmation from others—I now suspect accounts for why I inadvertently intimidate some people, especially certain men, and perhaps also why I have long inspired motivated detractors who simply can’t deal with me.

In later years, our dinner table remained a stage for a lively discussion club shaped by reports on the nightly news. Johnny and I learned to be assertive and, when necessary, loud—in order to get a word in edgewise. Alliances shifted among the four of us, depending on the issue; but, again, reinforced by lessons from our visits to Maine, we grew up being comfortable with verbal jousting, expressing our views with confidence, and engaging in worthy battle.

Arguably, my parents were never well-suited. My dad was not only brilliant and charming, but quick-tempered, impatient, and at least somewhat chauvinistic. My mom was beautiful, ambitious, and smart, but also high-strung, domineering, overtly powerful but latently insecure. Ultimately, they agreed on little, except politics, some friends, and their love for their children.

Sandy surprised me by asking, "Would you like to lead Senator Clinton's campaign foreign policy team?" I replied, "Sandy, I'm truly honored. I wasn't expecting this." After taking a deep breath, I continued, "Please thank Senator Clinton for me. I have enormous respect for her, but I have already committed to help Obama in a similar way." The silence on the other end of the line seemed interminable. Having gathered himself, Sandy said calmly, "Are you sure? You know he can't win, don't you?" I explained how I felt about Obama's candidacy, concluding, "This is not a choice against the Clintons, to whom I'll always be grateful. It's a decision in favor of Obama. And, yes, I'm sure." Stunned, Sandy said without rancor, "You realize, don't you, that you are making a foolish, potentially career-ending move?" The conversation ended civilly, and my relationship with Sandy never suffered. He remained a committed friend. Not everyone on the Clinton team felt the same way, even though in the grand scheme of the Clinton-Obama battle for talent, I was not a very senior defection. Looking back, I do not recall a time, even as a child, when I was shy about speaking my mind, afraid of what others might think of me, or was even fearful of another person. My parents reinforced my sense of self and stoked my innate confidence. At home, we argued energetically over policy and politics, so I learned early on how to hold my own in debates, marshal strong arguments, and present them forcefully. In the Rice household, one could not afford to be intimidated by loud voices or shy away from vigorous disputes.

Still I had no choice but to cope. I could not sit on the sidelines as my family burned with the risk that the conflagration would consume me and my little brother. Instead, I steeled myself and ran into the fire in hope that I might save something of their marriage, or if not, the ones I loved. Fearlessly, if foolishly, I offered myself as a sounding board for my parents' grievances against one another, trying to talk them toward calm, if not comity. As the older child, and in the absence of any alternative, starting at seven years old, I appointed myself chief firefighter, mediator, and judge, working to defuse arguments, broker compromises, and bring rationality to bear when emotion overwhelmed reason. In the process, I developed innate toughness,

calm under fire, and an intuitive sense of when conflicting parties might be able to reconcile. These elements of my character endured and afforded me an unconscious reservoir upon which to draw, when much later, in my chosen career, I found myself again trying to put out other people's fires and forge common ground.

My mother and father had the good sense to take both me and Johnny to a child psychiatrist to be evaluated. The doctors assessed that because I was expressing my feelings forcefully, I was coping adequately. Ever since, I have been a believer in not hiding emotions and expressing discontent, even anger, directly. With me, it's easy to know where you stand—for better or worse. To a fault, I hold myself and others to high standards, expecting the most out of those with whom I am closest, and continuously struggle to mask my impatience with shortcomings—mine and theirs.

While I admire my father more than anyone else, he possessed some less laudable characteristics, several of which I struggle with myself. Dad was opinionated and could be argumentative and quick-tempered. He was competitive, occasionally self-righteous, and utterly incapable of suffering fools. He would directly confront those he deemed subpar—whether an obnoxious journalist or an errant cab driver.

Over thirty years at the College Board, Mom lobbied strenuously to make college affordable for all. She worked closely with Senator Claiborne Pell to establish Basic Education Opportunity Grants, later renamed Pell Grants, which provide federal financial aid for low-income students. I am deeply proud that Lois D. Rice is widely lauded as “The Mother of Pell Grants” for her work in launching and sustaining this critical program, which has supported approximately 80 million Americans to attend college since 1973. Later, Mom would serve as senior vice president for government affairs at Control Data Corporation and as a director on eleven major publicly traded corporate boards, bringing her knowledge of Congress and public policy as well as her passion for equality to the private sector.

Spanning almost ten years, my parents' prolonged fighting, brutal divorce, and lengthy court battle were my first major searing trauma. I was disgusted by my parents' inability to put their children's interests first and seethed with a rage that overrode my sadness and sense of loss. Forced to grow up faster than I should have, I resented that my parents had stolen a piece of my childhood. Their divorce also left me wary of commitment in relationships with men, skeptical of the desirability and durability of marriage, and fearful of failing like my parents. Though I remained angrier at my mom than my dad, as an adult I have come to understand their actions and motives more clearly, and I am substantially more sympathetic to my mother's plight than I once was.

From this ordeal, I began learning how to nurture my relationships rather than take them for granted, to channel my frustrations into constructive effort rather than letting my anger fester. Discovering that I had the ability to steady myself, even in the eye of a storm, I emerged with greater confidence and inner strength. The onslaught had shown me I could take a bruising hit and keep running. Instead of being a victim, I counted my perseverance as a personal triumph. Painful as it was, the divorce gave me steel and grit, an early taste of adversity, and what I came to know as its corollary: resilience.

So I was surprised one day at practice when in conversation with the team on the sidelines of the gym, for no apparent reason and without rancor, she looked me in the eyes and called me "Nig***." Reflexively and immediately, I replied, "F*** you." That was the end of that conversation. My teammates were stunned into silence. I was shocked but not hurt. We both moved on. While I've never forgotten her epithet, I never blamed her for it. And she never blamed me for responding in kind. I understood that the N-word was likely one she heard growing up. It came out involuntarily and not maliciously, but I also knew it could not go unanswered. Cussing out a teacher was something I have not done before or since.

On one occasion, I attended a reading by the novelist, poet, and "womanist" Alice Walker. I had revered Walker for publishing her first book of poetry at twenty-four years old and winning the Pulitzer Prize

for *The Color Purple*. So I waited in a lengthy, slow-moving line to ask her to sign my book. When I reached the front, I eagerly told her, “I really admire and respect you. I have dreamt for many years that I might equal your literary success at such a young age. It’s a huge honor to meet you.” Her terse, dismissive reply left me shocked and disappointed. I have never forgotten that deflated feeling and, in years since, even when under pressure or tired, I’ve tried to be kind to young women who come to me, as I did to Walker, to convey their admiration.

Offered a real policy job that should have been quite appealing, I nonetheless took no time before giving him my reply. “No, thank you,” I said, “I’m not interested in working on Africa. I would prefer another portfolio.” No doubt put off by the arrogance of a twenty-eight-year-old neophyte, Sandy abruptly ended the conversation without clarity as to whether or not it would be our last. It wasn’t that I was uninterested in Africa, but as an African American woman in a very white male field, if my first job in government were focused solely on Africa, I feared I could get pigeonholed and never be viewed as someone who could work on wider issues. In retrospect, I marvel at my own chutzpah but am glad I refused to be typecast. Even though I understood that Tony and Sandy had no such intention, I recognized that other people’s perceptions could become my reality.

For about six months, Randy taught me the ropes—everything from how to write coherent, persuasive memos to the president and national security advisor, to how to run an effective interagency policy meeting. One of his most valuable pieces of advice, understood by too few foreign policy experts, was, “Follow the money.” By that, Randy meant learn the national security budget inside and out; he explained: “Where there is money, there is real potential policy impact. If you can grasp the budget and figure out where to vacuum up underutilized funds, you will run circles around your interagency colleagues.” This lesson served me well for the next twenty-five years.

At the peak of my youthful outrage after Black Hawk Down, as the events came to be known, I confessed to some good friends at a

dinner party, “If I had my way, we would turn Mogadishu into a parking lot.” At the time, the notion that we could send U.S. forces to a faraway land to save innocent lives only to have our own lives taken was infuriating and bewildering. Only with greater experience and maturity would I come to understand that, despite my occasional inclination to flatten our opponents (especially two-bit warlords), escalation and the use of overwhelming force against locals, particularly when it entails high civilian casualties, will almost always boomerang and undermine the mission—whether humanitarian, counterinsurgency, or counterterrorism.

In hindsight, what still strikes me most is the lack of discussion or debate. In those early weeks, we were reeling and did not have the customary policy meetings to decide what to do next. I, we, never proposed what seemed unthinkable—U.S. military intervention. It wasn’t that President Clinton decided not to intervene. As the genocide unfolded, the president never asked for, nor did his senior advisors present him with any decision to make on the matter. Four years later, on his first visit to Rwanda, in 1998, President Clinton apologized for the international community’s failure to respond swiftly enough to the genocide. In subsequent years, Clinton called Rwanda his “personal failure” and his “biggest regret” as president.

It’s hard to convey the myriad ways in which the Rwandan genocide affected me. It was a personal trauma, a source of nightmares and deep regret. Though I was not a senior decision maker, I was still a working-level participant in a massive policy failure. I carry the guilt with me to this day. It made me perhaps overly sympathetic to Rwanda, its people and leaders. It also rendered me hyper-vigilant in our efforts to try to prevent and resolve recurrent conflict and ethnic violence in Central Africa, not just in Rwanda, but also Burundi and Congo.

Failure, as I discovered early, is an inevitable result of policymaking. We did fail; we will fail. Our aim must be to minimize the frequency and the price of failure, while learning from our mistakes—and hopefully not the wrong lessons.

My reputation from the NSC, as I was about to discover, had preceded me. From what I was eventually told by close colleagues, I was perceived as smart, dynamic, decisive, bureaucratically skilled, and tough, but also brash, demanding, impatient, hardheaded, and unafraid of confrontation. Some had also dubbed me imperious, autocratic, micromanaging, and intolerant of dissent. Though it was clear (and probably resented) that I had strong backing and top cover from the White House and the seventh floor (the secretary's suite) at State, the open question was whether I could translate my access and relationships into policy success and increased respect and affection from the veterans of the Africa Bureau. At the outset, I estimated that about two-thirds of my direct reports were hostile or leaning negative toward me, and about one-third were open or leaning favorable. My aim was to flip that balance over the course of my tenure, fully recognizing that there were some who would never be fans.

While tireless effort is best exerted at every stage to try to end a war, I found that the breakthrough often only comes when one or both sides is exhausted and ready to relent. Until then, the conflict likely will not prove "ripe" for resolution through mediation.

Twenty-five years my senior, Howard had decades of experience on me. As a respected elder and fellow political appointee, largely invulnerable to any potential vengeance, he gamely accepted the mission (I presume from my career deputies) to deliver some very tough counsel. Over sweet-and-sour something, he calmly explained how I had alienated most members of my team. "You are too hard-charging and hardheaded," he said. Rather than listen well, he said, "You are overly directive and intimidate others so much that you quell dissent and stifle contrary advice." He allowed that I was smart, but too brash, knowledgeable but immature. He warned me bluntly that I would fail as assistant secretary if I did not correct course. Yet Howard also made clear that he wanted me to succeed and his advice came from a place of respect and affection. At first, I was knocked back, not expecting to be taken to the woodshed. As the seriousness of Howard's message sank in, I collected myself and listened carefully. Crushed by the weight of my own failure, I felt

relieved—even in that very difficult moment—that I had someone nearby like Howard who was not afraid to administer the toughest kind of love. I asked clarifying questions, without defensiveness, fully understanding how important and urgent his message was. After thanking him profusely for his guts and generosity, I took the holiday to fully absorb and reflect on what he said. I was hurt but sobered, chastened but not angry. He was right. I had to do better. I needed to be more patient, have multiple speeds, slow down, and stop driving my team so hard and fast, as the State Department shrink had counseled. I had to listen and solicit competing opinions, build personal relationships, not simply direct but generate collective ownership of decisions. In addition, as my third-grade teacher had long ago advised, I had to learn to be more patient and forgiving of others and show more respect for the experience of my career colleagues. Thanks to Howard, I was able to correct course before it was too late. Under his tutelage, I became a better leader and manager, as he kindly acknowledged. I also gained a deep appreciation and respect for the extraordinary talent and experience embodied in the career foreign service and civil service and have since done my utmost to help develop and promote the most promising officers.

On this trip, we flew in a small plane on what became a particularly memorable leg from Pretoria, South Africa, to Luanda, Angola, a 1,500-mile journey that required a refueling stop in rural Namibia. It was approximately a four-hour flight, so we left South Africa early in the morning to arrive in Angola by midday and go straight into meetings with senior officials. Along the way, as we plotted our message to the Angolans, the four of us sat close —almost toe to toe. Gayle and I faced forward, with John and Howard facing us, flying backward on our tiny plane. It made for convenient conversation, but soon was too intimate. About an hour into the flight, I started feeling clammy and weak. As my perspiration increased, my stomach turned over, signaling it was quite discontent. I announced to my colleagues, “I’m not feeling well,” and reached for the air sickness bag, which thankfully was handy. With muffled apologies, I opened the bag and threw up voluminously. Suddenly, to my horror, I felt my lap growing warm and wet. The bag had a hole in the bottom, and I was covered

in puke. My lightweight, rayon blue dress with white polka dots, once ready for my meeting with the president of Angola, was ruined, and I would have no time to change before my meeting. In a flash, I caught Howard and John sitting there slack-jawed in shock, but canny enough to gingerly pull back their feet to try to save their shoes from the vomit pooling beneath us on the floor. As soon as I finished being sick and realized the gravity of the situation, there was only one thing I could do: laugh hysterically. Kindly, as friends, they all joined me in howling at the insanity of the moment. But we still had the problem of the dress, and the leader of our delegation being a smelly, unpresentable mess. We landed on a dirt patch in nowhere Namibia to refuel as planned. There was a single gas pump, a water hole with hose, and some rudimentary bathrooms. The men gave us some privacy, as Gayle turned the hose on me and my dress, spraying me down until I was thoroughly drenched in the desert. She and I then went into the bathroom to strip down and ensure we had washed away all signs of vomit. Confident we had succeeded, all that remained was for me to air-dry over the ensuing couple of hours.

When I weighed in forcefully in opposition to his position, Holbrooke, dripping with sarcasm and condescension, responded slowly, “Ah, I remember when I too was a young assistant secretary...” Whatever else he said thereafter, I didn’t hear. His aim was to emasculate me (or the female equivalent) in front of the older ambassadors who reported to me. It was a pivotal moment: if I let him get away with denigrating me in front of six of my ambassadors, I would be weakened thereafter as leader of the Africa Bureau and the decider on U.S. Africa policy. If I said anything further, the conversation would have devolved into an ugly shouting match. With no better idea on how to respond, I looked him square in the face, as he continued to speak, and raised my right hand prominently, prolonging the display of my middle finger. He kept talking. It was clear he saw my gesture, but he never acknowledged it. While Wolpe and Prendergast were plainly amused, my ambassadors were uniformly shocked—some bemused and impressed, others horrified. As the discussion continued, I worried about two things. First, that our distinguished six-time ambassador now serving in Congo, William Swing, might have a heart attack. He was an older man, a genteel southerner with a

divinity degree, who agreed with Holbrooke's position and surely never expected to see a senior official, an assistant secretary no less, address a superior as I just did. Second, I wanted to tell my bosses in Washington what happened before Holbrooke did. For Swing, I simply prayed. For my bosses, I excused myself some minutes later and walked out into the hallway to reach Secretary Albright and National Security Advisor Sandy Berger. When I was connected to the secretary, I started, "I am calling to report that I just gave the finger to a member of President Clinton's cabinet." She laughed and asked for elaboration. I explained the back-and-forth, and she simply said, "Good for you!" Berger was equally amused and supportive. While I felt fully justified in my indignation with Holbrooke at the time and still do, if I had it to do over, with the benefit of age and experience, I might have found another way to convey the same message—with words and without profanity.

I learned that leadership is more like conducting a symphony than performing as a virtuoso player of any single instrument—often with multiple, potentially dissonant musicians and the need to achieve harmony among them. I also found that securing the buy-in and support of those career officials who will outlast any political appointee can be slow and cumbersome, but the extra effort and patience it takes to get there can pay lasting dividends. The most enduring outcomes are not always the swiftest ones; indeed, the best route from Point A to Point B is not always a straight line but could be a path with twists and turns. Belatedly, I resolved to make enemies wisely: if it is not necessary to burn a bridge, don't. Enemies you thought you left behind on the side of the road have a nasty habit of getting back up, dusting themselves off, and trying to chase you down. Another lesson learned: some adversaries aren't worth the effort; they are better ignored or given the Heisman (a stiff-arm) than combated directly. Others merit combat. As a matter of temperament and morality, I always prefer to be direct, as my father taught me, and thus to launch a prompt frontal assault. But I have learned with time that sometimes patience is the best strategy for achieving the purest justice.

As a baby, Maris ate readily, slept through the night at an early age (unlike Jake), and rarely cried without reason. At her first medical examination at one week old, our pediatrician touched her hairline and matter-of-factly observed, “She’s going to be blond.” Stunned, I blurted uncontrollably: “Get the f*** out of here!” Dr. Pullman looked at me impassively, glanced over at Ian knowingly, and replied, “You should have thought of that when you married him.” Stung and ashamed by my stereotypical expectations, I let the discussion of hair drop. When Maris’s hair started growing in earnest, to our surprise it was no-kidding red before changing to blond. I admit to hoping and assuming that I would have children who looked a bit more like me. Ian’s genes skunked mine, twice over.

As the difficult discussion progressed, things started to get heated. Russian ambassador Churkin was typically stubborn and obnoxious. The Chinese were hiding behind the Russians, opposing the tough proposed sanctions on our list. And the others were adding little value in moving us forward. Sensing an opportunity to shake up the negotiation and seize the initiative, I stood up suddenly, interrupting the conversation. I moved to my right and dramatically ripped a photograph off the wall. I sat back down and banged the framed photo on the table so that it faced my colleagues as I faux-raged: “We can either do this the nice way or the hard way. It’s up to you. But we are gonna get this done.” The photo I had selected was of John Bolton, the most widely disliked of my recent predecessors. All my colleagues at the table knew who he was, and many had had the displeasure of working with him. My stunt first silenced and then lightened the room but made a clear point: I was not playing, and we were not going to tolerate a lame outcome.

Drama, I learned, can be a useful negotiating tool, if sparingly employed. More importantly, my intimate dealings with the Chinese over the course of my U.N. years gave me critical insight into how their system operates, what their interests and fears are, and how to negotiate with them effectively. I found that pushing back relentlessly in the face of Russian obstruction and Chinese resistance was the key to success in the Security Council. Particularly as a rookie and the only woman among the P5 ambassadors, I realized that I needed to

consistently show confidence and resolve and never let them see me sweat. Thus, with the counsel and support of a first-rate team at USUN, I passed my first major test as U.S. ambassador, while gaining valuable experience and confidence as a negotiator.

My fear was that Qaddafi would reprise that rant in front of the Security Council, with Obama as chair unable to cut him off politely, thus overshadowing an otherwise successful event. The evening before the summit I called my Libyan counterpart, Ambassador Shalgham. I pleaded with him to do whatever he possibly could to ensure that Qaddafi stayed on script and on time. Shalgham calmly assured me, "It will be all right." "How can you be so confident?" I asked. He said, "Trust me. I promise we will stay within the time limits." I thanked him for his assurances and pledged to deliver a very nice bottle of champagne if he succeeded. Usually a good sleeper even when under stress, I did not sleep well at all that night. The next morning, as the session began, I realized why Shalgham had been so confident. He had somehow managed to persuade Qaddafi that the summit was not worth his time, and Shalgham represented Libya in the meeting as the only non-head of state at the table. Enormously relieved and appreciative, I sent over to the Libyan mission that afternoon a bottle of my favorite, Veuve Clicquot.

Of all the risky ventures I took while U.N. ambassador—from traveling to war zones in Iraq, Afghanistan, and South Sudan to being mobbed in Libya and trudging through the slums of Delhi, the closest DS got to having to save me was when my lead agent kindly and carefully removed cactus needles from my booty in Mexico.

Still, Romney went on the offensive: "There was no demonstration involved. It was a terrorist attack, and it took a long time for that to be told to the American people. Whether there was some misleading, or instead whether we just didn't know what happened, you have to ask yourself why didn't we know five days later when the ambassador to the United Nations went on TV to say that this was a demonstration. How could we not have known?" Jesus, I thought, as I watched from home. Now I'm in the middle of the presidential debate. This is nuts! Obama came back swinging, "The suggestion that anybody in my

team, whether the Secretary of State, our U.N. Ambassador, anybody on my team, would play politics or mislead when we've lost four of our own, Governor, is offensive." Boom. He sure did have my back. Undeterred, Romney kept going, accusing Obama of refusing to call Benghazi an "act of terror" until fourteen days later, and was incredulous when Obama replied that he called it that right away, on September 12, the day after the attack. CNN moderator Candy Crowley intervened, dutifully reading aloud the transcript of Obama's September 12 Rose Garden statement, in which he clearly used the words "act of terror." Romney appeared flummoxed and deflated. That was the last time Romney tried directly to bury Obama with Benghazi.

I don't mind being disliked. I would always rather be respected than liked, if I had to choose. But to have my integrity impugned, to be branded a liar, hurt like nothing I had experienced before. I fully understood that the attacks on me were a proxy for attacks on the president and, to some extent, that helped me not take it too personally during the election season. I also recognized that I was irresistible to Fox News, given my relatively high profile as Obama's U.N. ambassador and my perceived closeness to the president going back to his 2008 campaign. For the remaining weeks before the election, I viewed my role as to suck it up, take the hits, keep my head down, and survive to fight another day. It wasn't easy but putting mission first—continuing to represent the U.S. at the U.N.—made it a tolerable sacrifice.

Strangely, in the halls of the U.N., it was as if nothing had happened. Few, if any, colleagues broached the subject of Benghazi. The U.N. press corps, which questioned me multiple times a week, never once asked me about the Benghazi controversy, until after the election. At the U.N., this was a non-story—a dishonest political attack not worthy of distracting from the real issues we were dealing with such as Syria and the push for Palestinian statehood.

During the campaign, White House chief of staff Jack Lew told me that the president wanted me to be vetted as a candidate for secretary of state. I had been thoroughly scrutinized in 2008 before

being nominated for the U.N., but this was to be an updated and potentially even deeper vetting. I agreed and indicated my interest in the job, fully understanding that I was not the only candidate in contention. Senator John Kerry was also under consideration, and perhaps others. I had no firsthand reason to believe I was the president's preferred choice, despite a great deal of press speculation to that effect.

Totally uncharacteristically, President Obama nearly erupted: Well first of all I'm not going to comment at this point on various nominations that I'll put forward to fill out my cabinet for the second term. Those are things that are still being discussed. But let me say specifically about Susan Rice, she has done exemplary work. She has represented the United States and our interests in the United Nations with skill, and professionalism, and toughness, and grace. As I've said before, she made an appearance at the request of the White House in which she gave her best understanding of the intelligence that had been provided to her. If Senator McCain and Senator Graham, and others want to go after somebody? They should go after me. And I'm happy to have that discussion with them. But for them to go after the U.N. ambassador who had nothing to do with Benghazi? And was simply making a presentation based on intelligence that she had received? And to besmirch her reputation is outrageous. And, you know, we're after an election now. ... But when they go after the U.N. ambassador, apparently because they think she's an easy target, then they've got a problem with me. And should I choose, if I think that she would be the best person to serve America in the capacity at the State Department, then I will nominate her. That's not a determination that I've made yet.

I was in a luncheon for Security Council ambassadors at the Indian Mission to the U.N. when my phone started blowing up. I excused myself to find out what on earth was going on and ran smack into my assistant, who was coming to pass me a note about the president's statement. Mortified that he was compelled to defend me yet again, I was also deeply moved and gratified by the president's response. The force of his answer and his rare display of public anger revealed how determined he was to make his selection without regard for partisan political attacks.

Senator Bob Corker, who was the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, met with me separately. He was more civil but equally dismissive of my prospective nomination, calling me a partisan flack who was better suited to serve as spokesperson for the Democratic National Committee. Publicly, Corker said, "I don't think people around here want in the secretary of state's office someone who's a political operative." Then, straining credulity, he added, "But, I'll give her a fair hearing." By contrast, in a private pull-aside with me after our formal meeting, he told me candidly: "Your problem is that you are just too good." As he implied then and on later occasions, I was a smart, powerful communicator, whom admittedly he quite "likes." In his view, I was too effective a spokesperson, one the Republicans had every interest in sidelining. It wasn't personal, in his mind. It was politics.

My mother was heartbroken, but I think also a bit relieved. We cried together for several minutes. Mom told me, as always, "You know how proud I am of you and how much I adore you." She understood the basis for my decision and respected it. It meant everything to me to have her there to support me, to hold me close as if I were still her baby, and to assure me it would all be all right. Ian was disappointed but, as always, my rock. I later learned that he was much more upset and angry than he let me know at the time. My brother, Johnny, was deeply pained that I had suffered so much and furious that it was ending this way. He too hid much of his emotion from me, but I could sense his deep frustration. Maris was grateful this nightmare was about to be over and didn't hide her relief that we would soon put the ordeal behind us. The person whose reaction I was least prepared for was Jake's. I flew home and sat with him in our yellow-painted living room in Washington. He was then fifteen. I explained to Jake that I was withdrawing from consideration, because the fight wasn't worth it for our family or the country. Jake had been dispassionate and strong throughout the whole Benghazi drama, but suddenly he broke down into tears. He begged me to change my mind: "Mom, you can't quit. You are not a quitter. You taught me all my life never to give up. How can you do this?" I tried to explain, "Jake, this is not about me. Sometimes, you don't put yourself first. You put others first like your

family, the president, and our country.” He insisted, “I will be okay. The family can handle it. We have already been through the worst. You can’t let those people attacking you win.” We went back and forth for a while like this until he realized I wasn’t going to change my mind. I held him like my mom had held me and wept.

President Clinton pulled me aside to commiserate kindly about Benghazi and its aftermath. He told me, in effect, “That was tough stuff, and you held strong under fire. You handled it very well.” I was truly touched by his expression of concern and empathy. It meant even more coming from someone who had endured far worse. At the same party, Chelsea Clinton, who has always been lovely, engaged me in a more intimate conversation about how my kids were doing. She knew all too well how the politics of personal attack affect the families of those targeted, especially kids. I will forever be grateful for her sensitivity and warmth.

Johnny gave it to me straight: during Benghazi, I had “acted like a girl.” (Ouch.) He meant that I put everyone else’s interests above my own and that, after the election, I didn’t promote or campaign for myself the way a guy would have. “With you,” Johnny complained, “it’s always mission first. That’s your greatest strength, but it can also work against you.”

Next, Johnny insisted that I needed to learn that being good and right is not enough. Up until Benghazi, I had always succeeded on the basis of merit, but “sometimes, merit isn’t enough,” my brother cautioned. “This lesson has come to you late, since really you have not had any major professional failures before.” “You need people who will go the extra mile for you,” he continued. In reality, if there was a truth to be told or a fight to be had, I had never been afraid to stand up for what I believed. But as Johnny reminded me, I have always had difficulty asking others to do anything for me—even when I need it most. Johnny insisted: “You have to cultivate sponsors, champions, and ‘rabbis’ in advance.” He explained that, “When people see that you are under fire, you need them to jump in fast and be willing to battle on your behalf.” His comments made me realize that, on some level, I may also have suffered from lingering

resentment among some career veterans in the State Department who recalled my assertiveness and relentlessness as a young assistant secretary for Africa. Maybe, had I more enthusiastic advocates among their ranks at the early stage of the Benghazi onslaught, they might have helped to quietly blunt some of the most unfair characterizations of my motives. While I am deeply grateful for all those who ultimately came to my defense, their support came late, after months of public pummeling. Still, that was on me for not having asked earlier, or at all.