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Meeting Hillary Clinton

By: YOAV SIVAN

One lesson we have learned from the Democratic race so far - Hillary Clinton is one tough lady. Two weeks ago, her winning the Democratic nomination for president was as likely as David Paterson becoming governor of New York before 2014 - oops, wrong analogy.

Certainly by taking Texas and Ohio, Clinton increased her chances of getting the Democratic nomination, say from 20 to 45 percent. And if she wins Pennsylvania as expected, and if she then wins likely do-over primaries in Florida and Michigan - with their pro-Clinton Latino and industrial bases respectively - the odds will be 60 percent.

She'll have overtaken Barack Obama in the popular vote and he'll have to argue why he should be the first nominee in the modern history of the Democratic Party who lost the primaries of nearly every major industrial state. Though Hillary must not have envisioned this tortured path to the presidency, it may be the best thing that ever happened to both her and the nation. For this is the path that forced Hillary Clinton to step out of her husband's shadow.

Particularly after the primary in South Carolina, where Bill Clinton dismissed Obama's victory because Jesse Jackson once won there too, the Clinton label had become an albatross. Bill, who used to be called the nation's first black president, had begun unwittingly to help his party choose the nation's first African-American nominee for president.

Of course, had Hillary Clinton not been on the ballot, Bill would have been Obama's biggest booster from the start. New York Senator Hillary Clinton.

Instead, Bill's fulminations became the sideshow of a ringmaster who had seen better days. To be sure, the Clinton label and its mystique helped Hillary consolidate her pre-primary support - and the loyalty that may still carry the day for her among superdelegates who committed early. It gave her a head start in the Party's establishment and among donors.

Today, however, Bill Clinton's finger-wagging seems more confined to private fundraisers than splashed on public stages. The campaign trail's highest-profile Clinton, other than Hillary, is Chelsea.

We learn as much about a leader by the way she loses as by the way she wins. Hillary had planned a campaign in which her experience, skills, and the Clinton name, beloved in the Democratic Party, would take her to the nomination on automatic pilot. That didn't happen. She recalibrated. If what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, then what just barely didn't kill Hillary's candidacy - her husband's 2008 blunders - now gives her an independence that will make her presidency stronger.

This Bill-independency is important. As much as Americans like the Clinton label, they feel uncomfortable that the country may be governed for three generations by two



dynasties. Hillary's coming of age means that even if we have Bill again in the White House, he will have to adjust to the role of first lady, not make a come back as semi president. Hillary will be the commander in chief, in essence not just by title.

The long and undecided campaign has been instrumental - far more than the 3 a.m. telephone call ad - in helping us grasp how Hillary Clinton will be if she wins the White House than the time she had already spent there. No longer Mrs. Bill Clinton, Hillary stands now by her own merit.

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