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OBAMA IS DAMAGING HILLARY'S CHANCES

By Douglas E. Schoen and Patrick H. Caddell
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President Obama's high-risk immigration gamble may have severe consequences for Washington, the country and the Democratic Party, most of all Hillary Clinton.

Mrs. Clinton's putative bid for the Democratic presidential nomination is already running into trouble. The national exit poll from the recently completed midterm elections showed her with less than a majority of voters (43 percent) saying she would make a good president. When pitted against an unnamed Republican candidate, Mrs. Clinton lost 40 percent to 34 percent.

Those grim numbers followed on a September WSJ/NBC poll showing a plunge in Mrs. Clinton's favorability rating, to 43 percent, from 59 percent in 2009.

And that was before President Obama launched a defiant post-midterm campaign discarding political compromise and unilaterally doubling down on his unpopular policies. As a candidate, Mrs. Clinton would likely inherit a damaged party – and as a former member of his administration, she would struggle with the consequences of Mr. Obama's go-it-alone governance.

The latest indication of the president's politically damaging approach was his move on Thursday to unilaterally grant amnesty to an estimated five million illegal immigrants. A Rasmussen poll released Nov. 18 found that 53 percent of likely voters opposed the amnesty without congressional approval, while 34 percent approved. Moreover, 62 percent of those polled said that the president lacks the legal authority to take the action without congressional approval, and 55 percent said Congress should challenge the executive order in court.

That's a problem for Democrats, who will be asked to defend the president, as they have had to do with other Obama policies, like the Affordable Care Act, that lack the support of most Americans.

Another source of trouble for Democrats: The proposed Keystone XL pipeline, which is enormously popular – 59 percent of Americans are in favor, 31 percent against, according to a Pew poll this month. With the project so heavily favored, the president could score an easy win by backing the pipeline, but instead he has aligned himself with the elitist, environmentalist left led by billionaire environmentalist Tom Steyer.

Mr. Obama's willingness to disregard the public's wishes will hurt Mrs. Clinton in particular. The president's former secretary of state is already struggling to forge an independent identity without disowning the president. It will be almost impossible for Mrs. Clinton to directly oppose him over the next two years, though she will certainly continue to try to distance herself from Mr. Obama, as she did during her summer book tour. But if the president continues to lose the support of Democrats and moderates – as Mrs. Clinton has – she might have no alternative but to shelve her presidential ambitions.

If she does run, Mrs. Clinton could face a challenge from liberal populist Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Mrs. Clinton has struggled to adopt a populist mantle. The challenge was nowhere

more in evidence than when she appeared in Massachusetts with Ms. Warren in October, awkwardly urging the crowd: "Don't let anybody tell you that, you know, it's corporations and businesses that create jobs." She later explained that the line hadn't come out right.

Mrs. Clinton will have to work harder than that to dispel the impression among liberal Democrats that she is, as the line goes, the "candidate from Goldman Sachs," having numerous ties to the institution. The threat to a Clinton campaign from a Democratic rival running to her left, as Mr. Obama did in 2008, increased last week when populist former Virginia Sen. Jim Webb announced he is setting up an exploratory committee for a 2016 presidential bid.

Mrs. Clinton will also have to contend with her role as the architect of "HillaryCare" in the 1990s, a clear forerunner to the Affordable Care Act, which was not popular with Americans when it was passed and now has the approval of only 37 percent, according to a recent Gallup poll.

It appears that Mrs. Clinton is trying to have it both ways on immigration by supporting President Obama but saying that the only lasting solution is congressional action. And on Keystone, she has been missing in action.

And if that weren't enough, foreign policy – which should be a selling point for the former secretary of state – will be a minefield. The president seemingly has no coherent strategy to deal with Islamic State terrorists in Iraq and Syria, no coherent strategy for dealing with Russian President Vladimir Putin's bellicosity in Eastern Europe, and no coherent strategy for dealing with the Iranian nuclear program. Regardless of whatever news emerges from the Nov. 24 deadline for a nuclear deal with Iran, this story will drag on for ages, as the mullahs would prefer.

All of these foreign-policy dead zones have roots in Mrs. Clinton's tenure as secretary of state, when she logged hundreds of thousands of miles without alighting on any significant successes. The Republican takeover of the Senate may bring fresh attention to her role in the deadly debacle in Benghazi, Libya, with victims that included U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

With President Obama now courting a constitutional crisis over his unilateral action on immigration reform, the Democratic Party is losing popularity by the day. The pressure is on Mrs. Clinton to separate herself from the partisan polarization and dysfunction in Washington while not alienating the liberal Democrats who dominate turnout in presidential primaries. She needs to distance herself from Mr. Obama without alienating his strongest supporters, but she also needs to develop a clear reason and logic for why she should be elected president – a logic that six years after she first declared her candidacy remains more elusive than ever.

Barack Obama could end up beating Hillary Clinton yet again.

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