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Of all his transition choices, none was easier to make, or more complex to execute, than Hillary Clinton as secretary of state. Obama had long wanted his former rival on his team, no matter what his friends and aides said about her aggressive campaign... His staff opposed the idea for the most part, arguing that Clinton would never be truly loyal. But Obama was willing to leave the primaries behind, including his own strong feelings at the time. "I don't hold grudges," he told his aides. "I don't worry about the past. I'm concerned about what happens now. If she can help me and Bill Clinton isn't too much of a liability, we should seriously look at this."

...

Obama was under no illusion about the legacy of the long primary season. During one transition meeting, Obama said he wanted to offer Clinton the diplomatic job. "I'm really interested in pursuing this, but I know she has some hard feelings coming out of this campaign." Emanuel and John Podesta, the former Clinton official who ran the transition, assured Obama that she was over those hard feelings now. Obama smiled and said, "Believe me. She's not over it yet."

His decision to offer her the job of secretary of state came surprisingly early. Well before the end of the primaries, when his staff and friends still felt hostile to her, Obama decided that Clinton possessed the qualities to carry his diplomacy to the rest of the world. "We actually thought during the primary, when we were pretty sure we were going to win, that she could end up being a very effective secretary of state," he told me later. "I felt that she was disciplined, that she was precise, that she was smart as a whip, and that she would present a really strong image to the world...I had that mapped out."

Recruiting and managing a team of rivals would not be easy, and Clinton came with her own set of issues. Chief among them was her campaign debt, which she wanted eliminated before she took the job of secretary of state. Would the president-elect go out and help her to do so? "I'm not begging her to take this job," Obama told his senior aides. "If she wants it, I could help. But I'm not willing to go out in these difficult economic times to do a flashy fundraiser in California." As it happened, plenty of people in the Senate were begging Obama to offer Clinton the job. Obama's aides believed that many Senate Democrats thought Clinton had extended her presidential campaign far beyond the point where she had lost the election. Her negative advertising wasted Democratic money, threatened to undermine the party's nominee, and suggested that she was disloyal to the party. They were unwilling to offer the junior New York senator a position ahead of her lowly rank, and she stood little chance of becoming majority leader. "There was a lot of encouragement from inside the Senate to get her into this job," said one senior Obama aide. "They wanted her out of there." ...

As for controlling the uncontrollable Bill Clinton, Obama's aides drew up a series of checks on his fundraising for both Clinton Global Initiative and his work on HIV/AIDS across the world. But they really counted on

Hillary to be the ultimate safeguard - against both her husband and her own ambition. "It's in her interests to keep him in line," warned one senior Obama aide. Others in Obama's inner circle said the president-elect believed Clinton needed to demonstrate that she was a team player and to shape her own career and legacy. "There are plenty who don't trust her and think she still harbors something," said another senior adviser. "It's still potentially problematic down the road. Barack's thinking on this is that it's not in her interests to mess with us. She can't win that fight internally and she's smart enough that she won't want that fight publicly."

Several weeks into the administration, even Clinton's internal critics believed the relationship was a success. "They have both worked really hard at it," said one senior White House official. "There's a natural affinity and respect that ironically grew out of being opponents. You get to know someone really well after all that."

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