



The Secretary: A Journey with Hillary Clinton from Beirut to the Heart of American Power

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Drawing on extensive interviews with Clinton, administration officials and other players around Washington, a foreign correspondent with both an insider and a global perspective tells the story of Hillary Clinton as America's envoy to the world. 40,000 first printing.

The Secretary: A Journey with Hillary Clinton from Beirut to the Heart of American Power Details

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From Reader Review The Secretary: A Journey with Hillary Clinton from Beirut to the Heart of American Power for online ebook

Christopher says

(Note:Customer review from the Amazon Vine™ Program)

Only a month after she vacated her office at Foggy Bottom, it is already hard not to think about Hillary Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State without nostalgia. Ms. Ghattas' book on her time as a State Department reporter for the BBC following Mrs. Clinton makes a strong case for considering Mrs. Clinton as one of the greatest Secretaries of State to have ever come along. Ms. Ghattas has a unique view on the topic as she is both an outsider and an insider in more ways than one: she's a reporter for the BBC, so she is able to get as close to the policy machine as possible and still maintain an outsider's perspective and skepticism. She is also from Lebanon, born of Lebanese and Dutch parents, and came of age during Lebanon's civil war. So, she is able to view U.S. foreign policy making from a perspective that almost no one else can. In fact, this book is part biography whose subject is Mrs. Clinton and the tireless staffers around her, part travelogue as much of her story details Mrs. Clinton's extensive travels around the world meeting with heads of state to hash out foreign policy details and rebuild America's credibility and reputation after eight bad years under the Bush administration, and part autobiography as Ms. Ghattas comes to understand America's power and influence in a way she couldn't have as a child growing up in civil war. Through Ms. Ghattas' journey the reader comes to understand not just how difficult foreign policy making has become in the 21st century, but how the world views America in the 21st century. It is incredibly well-written, nuanced but easily understandable, and detailed in a way few books on foreign policy are. This was an absolutely fascinating read and I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in U.S. foreign policy.

Karen says

I found this audiobook fascinating: It reinforced for me that not only are politics local, they're personal as well. It's not possible to successfully negotiate with another party (whether it be an individual or a country's ambassador) without truly listening to the other party and sincerely responding to their concerns... Kim Ghattas's book indicates Hillary Clinton understood this need as Secretary of State.

Ghattas provides a unique insider / outsider perspective as a BBC correspondent who grew up in Lebanon and became part of the press contingent accompanying Secretary of State Hillary Clinton around the globe. Ghattas contrasted her perspective as a child growing up in war-torn Lebanon against insights she gained by speaking "on background" with Clinton and other U.S. officials, and how she began to realize that foreign policy frequently engendered difficult decisions not lightly made nor easily executed. Clinton is an interesting public figure but Ghattas's insider / outsider perspective makes this book even more interesting and nuanced. Kate Reading's narration was enjoyable and she easily transitioned from the author's perspective to voicing Hillary's broad midwestern accent. I enjoyed this audiobook and recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about U.S. foreign policy during Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State.

Rick says

I received Kim Ghattas' "The Secretary" through a Goodreads Advanced Readers contest ... here is my take.

Depending on ones' political affiliation Hillary Rodham Clinton can be an easy person to dislike. She is pushy, political, polarizing, and any number of other P words. She has been a Washington fixture for 20 years, ever since Bill Clinton was elected president in 1993. As such, while she might have been new to the State Department in 2008, she was hardly a neophyte in Washington affairs. So it was with some anticipation that I looked forward to this new book.

Ghattas was a 30-something journalist who was named the BBC's State Department correspondent roughly coincident with Hillary Clinton becoming Secretary of State (SecState). Flying with the SecState around the world for four years gave the author unparalleled access and background to write this book – which is basically a linear travelogue of the trips the Secretary took with brief summaries of America's involvement in each of the countries visited ... with a bit of backstory to give context.

Beirut-born Ghattas grew up during much of the 1975–90 civil war in Lebanon, and was a youngster in 1983 when a suicide bomber took out the U.S. Marine barracks near the Beirut airport. With that background, Ghattas brought personal baggage to her assignment, and I was interested to see what would bleed through. I found the book to be a nicely balanced report on Clinton's exercise of power in refreshing America's status around the world. While Ghattas took the occasional slap at former President George W. Bush and former SecState Condoleezza Rice, she also highlighted mistakes made by Hillary Clinton and the Obama Administration.

As to Hillary Clinton, it takes a unique person to fight tooth and nail against an opponent in a presidential primary and then turn around and provide that opponent with substantive aid when called on later. But to her credit, Clinton as SecState did an admirable job. The book covers all the main goings-on around the world dealt with by SecState Clinton – dealings with China (including the Asia Pivot), Israeli/Palestinian relations (especially the intransigence of Netanyahu), the sinking of the South Korean naval corvette Cheonan by the North Koreans, Wikileaks, the revolutions in the Middle East (the Arab Spring - Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Syria), and the nuclear meltdown of the Japanese Fukushima reactor.

This book is timely ... it mentions how Syria is still a developing story and still a flashpoint in the Middle East – and as of this writing the new SecState John Kerry is offering Syria American aid to address some of the problems. What is most interesting about the Ghattas' book is how she shows America often has limited choices, or choices with huge consequences either way. While American diplomacy may have been black & white fifty years ago (my way or the highway), it certainly is very grey today. The role and number of superpowers has changed.

I liked this book a lot – four stars. Anyone interested in foreign service, especially those with career interest, should read it to get a feel for the important work the thousands of people in our diplomatic corps do around the world. Budding journalists might also be attracted to this work.

Correen says

Kim Ghattas is a Beirut born journalist who flew 300,000 miles with Hillary Clinton during her time as Secretary of State. Ghattas mingles her life as a child in a war-torn country, dependent upon the governments of several countries, the U.S. in particular, for her safety and the future of her country. With this background, she reports, explains, and relates to the impact of Hillary Clinton during her diplomatic efforts in the mid and far-east. The result is a clear and interesting report of foreign policy and procedure for the first four years of the Obama administration.

Landis says

This book is - trying to find the right word here.... astonishing (a bit too strong), interesting (a bit too weak), insightful (too bland), excellent (too general), amazing (too flamboyant), awesome (too overused). It is insightful, well written, and masterful. Kim Ghattas, the author, is a Lebanese reporter for the BBC who grew up in Lebanon during its civil war and its subjection as a vassal state of Syria. As such she has a personal knowledge of an oppressed people waiting for America to do something. She also has experienced the anger and disappointment expressed by so many towards the US.

What is interesting about the book is the growth in understanding of both the country, America, itself, the issues facing it in the international arena, and a growing appreciation of the complexity of our relationships abroad on the part of Ms. Ghattas.

In the book there is an appreciation of the difficulties faced by Secretary Clinton and her indefatigable approach to personal diplomacy which often left her press contingent exhausted, hungry, and waiting to move on to the next stop. There is also reporting on the give and take between government sources and the press and specific examples of the ways that the press helped to focus attention on matters that had gotten lost in a veritable landslide of international events to which the Administration needed to respond.

Hillary Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State was during a period of such ferment that I can only be thankful that someone with her energy, commitment, and vision was at the helm. This was a period of Wikileaks, the Arab Spring, and the growth of China as a power, as well as increasing attempts by both Iran and N. Korea to develop nuclear arms. After the damage that the US' unilateral strike into Iraq did to the reputation of the US in the international arena, it would have been enough of a job for the Secretary to work towards rebuilding the country's reputation, but to have to rebuild reputation and to steer through these roiling waters is truly astonishing.

If you were not a fan of Hillary before, there is no way you can come away from this book without a profound appreciation for the service she rendered this country during a highly charged era. I highly recommend it.

Kurt says

Ghattas writes this book to reflect upon the years she spent as part of the press corp following Secretary Hillary Clinton around the globe. The strengths of the book, then, come from the heart and mind that Ghattas herself brings to the work. She describes complicated diplomatic situations, like the Arab Spring and China's increasing regional influence, in ways that I can understand. She gets to the value of slow, low-profile coalition-building, which may not seem impressive but has a lot of potential to make progress without creating quagmires. She clarifies the impact of Secretary Clinton's choice of first diplomatic visit, and of personal friendships cultivated during her time as First Lady. I finished the book with a much better sense of what a Secretary of State can do when presented with problems.

I also finished the book with a much better sense of how my country is perceived in other parts of the world. Ghattas brings a great deal of personal experience into her writing, especially in her reflections on her youth in the Lebanese civil war. She draws a common picture in which people in many other countries assume that the United States is able to immediately do whatever it wants, and I get a sense of how real the betrayal feels

when ongoing injustices are allowed to continue. This perspective adds a layer of compassion to the book, and it makes for an even more interesting read.

The book's strengths, though, are a little overwhelmed (for me, at least) by the embarrassing fawning tone that Ghattas picks up when she begins describing Secretary Clinton herself. If you've ever read about an important diplomatic meeting and wondered, "What color pantsuit was the Secretary wearing?" then fear not, Ghattas will not leave you uninformed. Also, I don't know what "kitten heels" are, but I think I got a heads-up every time Secretary Clinton wore them. Ghattas goes on about how glamorous Huma Abedin is, and how they talk about her upcoming fancy wedding, and it's all a little more Tiger Beat than I'd like to see in a serious piece of journalism. I mean, Ghattas even goes so far as to claim, when Secretary Clinton arrived predictably late for a large town hall meeting in South Korea but then said she was delighted to be there, "[T]hey felt so special that they forgave her instantly for being late." Really? Was Ghattas able to poll the entire audience? Or is this Ghattas being starstruck and shifting that onto the nameless crowd members around her?

Let me be clear, please. I like Secretary Hillary Clinton. I would have voted for her for President in 2008, and I will likely vote for her in 2016 if I have the option. It's why I chose this book from the Amazon Vine program. I like that Ghattas also likes her, a lot. But for me, Ghattas presents so much texture and nuance and analysis of foreign policy and its impacts (both for regular people and for high-ranking officials), and when that consistently gets overpowered by the energy and charisma every time the star of the book takes the stage, it makes me wish for a book written by someone with a more objective view. I do not recommend this book.

Vikas Datta says

Outstanding account of Mrs Clinton, who proved herself to be a consummate and seasoned diplomat, and American power in action. Also provides an incisive view into the global perceptions of it as well as what it cannot accomplish. Though there are gaps - into relations with Russia and India chiefly as well as the Afghan quagmire - but the glimpses of US responses during the Wikileaks issue and the Arab Spring are most valuable. Additionally, the efforts of Ms Ghattas - whom I wish should consider writing more books - to obtain closure to questions that have been impinging on her own life in her homeland are brought out very well. Six stars if it had been possible

Judie says

THE SECRETARY, A JOURNEY WITH HILLARY CLINTON FROM BEIRUT TO THE HEART OF AMERICAN POWER by Kim Ghattas was a difficult book to review. My first draft ran almost four pages. There was so much interesting material and so much that I wanted to say about it. But that review would have discouraged readers, so this is my abbreviated final draft.

Ghattas does an excellent job not only explaining the situations Hillary encountered but also how the US is viewed by many other countries, how our image and abilities are changing, and what role Hillary has played in that change. The book will be out in early March and I highly recommend it.

Kim Ghattas was born in Lebanon in 1977 and grew up during its Civil War. At the time she wrote THE SECRETARY, she was a BBC reporter covering the US State Department. As such, she received the daily briefings and traveled with Hillary Clinton on all her overseas assignments. It is the story of how Hillary performed her duties as well as how Ghattas interpreted the events based on her personal experiences and

how she came to understand why the US acted as it did.

When President Obama came into office, people in many countries of the world had a very low opinion of the US, primarily because of actions and inactions during the previous administration. “In 2000, 75 percent of Indonesians had a positive view of America....By 2007, only 29 percent” did.

America, the only remaining superpower, was seen in many ways: a bully, all-powerful, controlling, a financier, a miracle-worker and a supporter of despots. People thought that America was behind everything that happened in their country (especially bad things) and that their country was the most important country in the world and at the top of America’s agenda. Both views were faulty. They expected America to take care of them (especially financially) and protect them, yet at the same time complained that America was behind every action of their own government that they did not like. Many countries were glad to take the money, often padding the pockets of only a few well-connected people, but resented having to do anything to justify the support income.

Ghattas wrote, “One of the reasons countries and people were so often disappointed in the US was an unrealistic expectation of what the US should and could do. Governments everywhere that instinctively and narrowly pursued their national interest somehow expected the United States to suspend the pursuit of its own interest to please them.”

Hillary desire to meet with the people of the country, not just the politicians was a break from her predecessors. She held town hall meetings wherever she went, talking to the public and answering their questions. This made for some extremely long days for her, her staff, and the press corps. She also worked to establish connections with government leaders who were upset with the US as well as with those who had no dealings. She had met several as First Lady and used that connection to help reestablish good working relationships. She also used her position to push for human rights and women’s rights.

Her first trip was to Japan and Asia where China’s rising position in the world was a main topic and is highlighted in *THE SECRETARY*. Another area covered is the WikiLeaks scandal in which copies of secret (but not classified) e-mails were hacked and published. This caused a fear that people would be less forthcoming in the future. Many world leaders were upset about how they were described by the e-mail writers but others were impressed that they were important enough to be mentioned.

A big problem Hillary faced was that Americans and their government thought there was a solution for every problem, we knew what it was, it could be accomplished quickly, cheaply, and we could leave. Too often, there was no back-up plan if things did not work out. “The minute US troops set foot in a country, they started looking for the exit....to get out: missions were ill-prepared and ill-defined. Success, too, was ill-defined.”

In explaining the role of the State Department and Hillary’s position, the book goes into a lot of detail about Japan, China, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Libya, the Palestinian territories, the Arab Spring, and visiting Burma.

Hillary’s relationship with President Obama evolved over the years. He had to work with someone who was as popular as he. At first, he was surrounded by his trusted circle. A good soldier, she gave her views and advice, getting more and more confident. After two years, he sought her advice before making decisions. She understood how to work with other cultures. It was necessary to establish a relationship before dealing with issues. People in other countries were very familiar with American office holders because their decisions affected their everyday lives. They heard their country mentioned reports of press briefings in their local news, not realizing it was because someone asked a question, not that the government brought it up. Their leaders would try to build political capital by looking tough and standing up to America.

Americans are “upfront, efficient, result-driven people who expected quick turnarounds and believe every problem had a solution.” “Eventually, before anything was really fixed...and sometimes before the real problems had even started, Americans had moved one, they had other problems to attend to. People on the ground felt invaded, abandoned, and betrayed, all at once. They saw America as an impatient, fickle friend. It didn’t matter how much money the United States had invested, wasted, spent; it didn’t matter how many US troops had died.” “They wanted more.” Hillary noted, “We don’t have any magic wands that we can wave.” The people in other countries were very familiar with the US and thought we knew all about them as well.

“The more a country felt its fate was impacted by the United States, the more detailed their knowledge was.

Tribal leaders in Afghanistan and Palestinian police officers knew the names of American congressmen

because they had blocked or approved aid bills that impacted their towns.”

Seeing stories while in Pakistan that America was “supporting the Pakistani Taliban in a bid to weaken Pakistan and bolster India,” Ghattas notes that “In the Middle East, the devising of conspiracy theories is an art form, but rarely before had I seen this level of unsubstantiated reporting. Even by Middle East Standards, the Pakistani media was shameless.” Yet she doesn’t make the same distinction when discussing Israel and the Palestinians. She places a lot of blame on Israel and cites its deficiencies, but does not state what the Palestinians have or have not done to bring a peaceful solution nor does she mention all the lies against Israel spread by Arab and Muslim states.

Instead of going it alone, the US worked to involve other countries in decisions and actions. While the US was accused of holding back, it was often working behind the scene and letting others take the credit, especially to avoid anti-American sentiment from derailing the work of the UN or other groups.

European countries often looked down on the US and were not upset when it had problems until they realized what would happen to their own economies if the US economy declined.

Ghattas notes “Clinton’s key contribution is...repositioning American as a leader in a changed world, a palatable global chairman of the board who can help navigate the coming crises, from climate change to further economic turmoil to demographic explosions.

“America, as powerful and strong as we are, cannot remake societies. We can help liberate them, like Libya, but we cannot remake them. That must come from within and there needs to be a reformation in thinking amongst people in countries that have been downtrodden, oppressed, violence-ridden, and there needs to be higher expectations and demands placed on leaders who should be reconcilers, not dividers.”

“There will be times when not all our interests align. We work to align them, but that is just reality.”

The photographs and captions in the book provide an excellent synopsis.

I received this book as an early reviewer from LibraryThing.

Marcus says

2.5/5 stars

The author's personal story and perspective are interesting, but a large part of the book is an overview-level summary of what it's like to be in the State Department press pool and how it was on the trips Hillary took. During most of the book this doesn't feel narratively strong enough to really be that compelling. I don't think you get *that* strong of a sense of Hillary as a person for a book that is ostensibly about her, nor of those immediately around her.

I also agree with some reviewers that the book seems too positive or partisan, often. A set of underlying assumptions are present in the book's tone and a number of them are questionable. For example I felt the author overstated a bit the extent to which the United States' status abroad was harmed in the aftermath the Bush administration. It also seemed too accepting of the premise that leading from behind is necessarily a good aim.

The chapters on Syria and Libya were the strongest points; they delivered on a weighty and more narratively engrossing account following a continuous thread, more so than the repeated descriptions of civil society town halls and travel planning that line most of the book.

MLV says

Not a book about Hillary as much as a fresh perspective on US foreign relations through the eyes of a Lebanese BBC journalist. Her candid insights about her own journey are an insightful and interesting way to learn about how American foreign policy actually works and why it doesn't always seem to work. If you have ever been confused about peace in the Middle East, how billions in foreign aid works, why countries can one day be enemies and another day allies, the war on terror versus war on human rights violations, how the president decides the position of the US on any foreign topic, how free the press actually is, or If you live on planet Earth, you should read this book because global cooperation is the only hope for the future and Hillary just made it once again possible.

Jaylia3 says

There are at least two aspects of this book by BBC correspondent Kim Ghattas that make it particularly interesting. It's almost as if two books coexist between its covers, one written by an insider and the other by an outsider. Ghattas, born in Lebanon, covered the US State Department while Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State, so The Secretary has a well-informed insider view of Clinton and the way she works. Ghattas spent a lot of time traveling around the world with Clinton and her staff, and what Ghattas was able to observe eventually convinced her that Hillary's intelligent and engaging style of diplomacy was re-positioning America's leadership role in ways that will help it stay effective and relevant in our rapidly changing world.

Ghattas witnessed major world events firsthand and her behind the scenes perspective make a fascinating history of the last few years. Pivotal developments she recounts in this book include the Arab Spring, the opening of Burma, the release of the Wikileaks documents, and the fallout from the Japanese earthquake. The September 11, 2012 attack on the US embassy in Libya occurred too late to be included, but it's not the events themselves that give structure to The Secretary, it's Ghattas's status as an outsider. Ghattas grew up in war torn Beirut and her evolving outsider observations, insights, and opinions about America's superpower status and what America could and should do in the world drive the narrative and make The Secretary much more fascinating than even a portrait of Hillary Clinton could be.

Mmars says

First, I would like to thank Kim Ghattas for giving us this straight-forward look at being a member of the press corp covering one of the most important members of a Presidential cabinet. Second I'd like to state Ghattas inarguably became laudatory of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over the course of four years. However, even if you are no Hillary fan, there is much to learn from this book.

What is most fascinating is Ms. Ghattas' background as a survivor of the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in October 1990. She does not begin her reporting as a firm believer in American foreign policy. This background allows Ghattas to give the reader an in-depth understanding of how the rest of the world views the United States' diplomacy, power, and actions and inactions. She also does an excellent job of providing brief histories of the many, many countries and dignitaries Secretary Clinton must negotiate with. It was interesting to watch Clinton's relationship with Obama slowly develop from early missteps to collaboration to full trust in decision making.

If you follow world politics, the events may be quite familiar, but what was happening behind the scenes

may not be. And both the role and the importance of the press corps cannot be understated. Having an Arabic speaker and Middle Eastern transplant in the corps questioning Hillary about Tunisia before the revolution was on their radar enabled the State department to realize they were missing something. Perhaps, not in as alarming a way as in hindsight would have been prudent. But important, nonetheless.

For anyone interested in politics, Hillary Clinton, and the media and how it works it's a must read. It should be a must read for the whole world, but of course, only a few will pick it up and I'll bet there are many who will not read it cover to cover. Get over it being about Hillary. It's a good and important book that increases one's understanding of the world and how it operates.

Oh, and I can say this book did not change my opinion of Hillary. And what that is I need not say. (4 stars because it's a times a bit tedious.)

Leyla says

I wanted to know if this book was going to be pro- or anti- Hillary Clinton; the best parts are the Conclusion and the Acknowledgments, but that is just because I can't make much sense of politics and foreign affairs. In the end, I'm pleased and will keep the book in my library. Thank you Goodreads. I hope Kim writes another book.

Jennifer says

4.5/5

The Secretary: A Journey with Hillary Clinton from Beirut to the heart of American Power by Kim Ghattas is a book I long awaited, having a political science background, I have been reading about the Secretaries of State for quite some time now and this book did not disappoint me. Ghattas has a rather unique perspective as she is a BBC reporter, in the new corps traveling with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, but she was raised in war torn Lebanon, which enables Ghattas to offer the reader a much broader view of the duties of the Secretary of State as well as a view of the United States and its policies from a non-American viewpoint. I would not hesitate to recommend *The Secretary* to anyone interested in history, politics, or simply curious about what the Secretary of State actually does. I will be reading more books about Mrs. Clinton, to get a more balanced look into this remarkable time in American history.

Sarah says

A readable snapshot of some foreign policy issues that took place during Hillary Clinton's time in the State Department, which is useful in case you were preoccupied by other things at the time (like the recession, for example). Ghattas's personal history is interwoven with her observations of Clinton, the public and semi-private figure. Ghattas grew up in Beirut during Lebanon's civil war and felt a deep sense of betrayal at what many believed was the United States' green-lighting the 1990 Syrian invasion. One of the biggest recurring themes is the tension between world players wanting the mighty U.S. to fall or GTFO, and dismay at realizing the U.S. isn't as omnipotent as perceived (or, as one official tells Ghattas, "We're holding things together with chewing gum and rubber bands.").

There's little narrative resolution of the issues, which I guess reflects the practical reality of foreign policy. The lack of follow-up can be unsatisfying (the 2011 Egyptian revolt seems to end in triumph with Mubarak stepping down and everyone going home, at least until the Afterword, and the Benghazi attack gets about a paragraph), but the overarching message of foreign policy as a thankless, never-ending task comes through. Guess which job sounds even worse than President of the United States?

Ghattas characterizes the Obama administration's approach to foreign policy as reparative, an attempt to change the U.S.'s post-9/11 reputation and reposition the US as partner and not sole proprietor. Ghattas's position is that Clinton was always out ahead of President Obama on "smart power," and it's clear by the end that Ghattas thinks Clinton was enduringly successful. Early on, Ghattas recalls her first trip home to Beirut as part of Clinton's entourage, where Clinton mentions Ghattas's homecoming on Lebanese national television as a way to forge a personal connection with the people. Ghattas feels used and conflicted at the time, but it isn't entirely clear to me what makes her misgivings evaporate - it's just clear that they do. Perhaps the greater lesson for Clinton detractors is to watch out, she'll charm you.

Overall this was enjoyable and best read as a personal journey rather than as a comprehensive account of Clinton's State Department.
