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‘Don’t say you were blackmailed’: How Hillary’s aides strong-armed reporters into writing nicely about Clinton, revealed in secret emails

- Marc Ambinder, formerly of The Atlantic, agreed to describe a [Clinton](#) speech as ‘muscular’ under the orders of aide Philippe Reines
- Ambinder also agreed to write that Clinton was seated next to three powerful figures for the talk at the Council on Foreign Relations
- Reines laid out his conditions in an email which had the conspiratorial joke: ‘Don’t say you were blackmailed!’
- Ambinder, who is now editor-at-large at The Week magazine, did not return calls and emails asking for comment
- For more of the latest on Hillary Clinton visit www.dailymail.co.uk/hillary

By [Daniel Bates](#)

Published: 17:07 EST, 10 February 2016 | Updated: 17:43 EST, 10 February 2016

The extent of [Hillary Clinton’s](#) control over the media has been laid bare in emails from her personal spokesman which show he he ‘blackmailed’ a writer at one of America’s most prestigious magazines.

Marc Ambinder, the former politics editor at The Atlantic, agreed to describe a Clinton speech as ‘muscular’ under the orders of Philippe Reines, one of her toughest enforcers.

Ambinder agreed to write that Clinton was seated next to three powerful figures for the talk at the Council on Foreign Relations - to make her look more important.

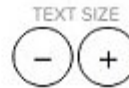
Reines laid out his conditions in an email which had the conspiratorial joke: ‘Don’t say you were blackmailed!’



Secret emails: Hillary Clinton's (pictured left on Wednesday) control over the media has been revealed in emails from her personal spokesman Philippe Reines (pictured right) to a reporter

Hillary Clinton's 'Smart Power' Breaks Through

Clinton stakes front and center in a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations.



MARC AMBINDER | JUL 15, 2009 | POLITICS

Editor's note: On February 9, 2016, Gawker called the reporting of this post into question. It is The Atlantic's policy never to cede to sources editorial control of the content of our stories.

When you think of President Obama's foreign policy, think of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. That's the message behind a **muscular** speech that Clinton is set to deliver today to the Council on Foreign Relations. The staging gives a clue to its purpose: seated in front of Clinton, subordinate to Clinton, in the first row, will be three potentially rival power centers: envoys Richard Holbrooke and George Mitchell, and National Security Council senior director Dennis Ross.

Evidence: Marc Ambinder, the former politics editor at The Atlantic, agreed to describe a Clinton speech as 'muscular' under the orders of Philippe Reines, one of her toughest enforcers

The emails, which were reported by [Gawker](#), show in stark detail the cozy relationships between Reines and reporters under which he traded scoops for favorable coverage for his boss.

A spokeswoman for The Atlantic confirmed to Dailymail.com that [Ambinder's story](#) 'goes against our standards' and did not rule out taking it down from their website.

The original article has been updated to read: 'It is The Atlantic's policy never to cede to sources editorial control of the content of our stories'.

The emails were obtained by Gawker after a Freedom of Information request put in four years ago, which it is suing the State Department over.



Correspondence: Reporter Marc Ambinder's emails with Philippe Reines surfaced this week

The speech Clinton gave took place on July 15 2009 and the day began with Ambinder asking Reines for an advance copy.

Among those attending would be the former US envoy to Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, the former special envoy for the Middle East, George Mitchell, and National Security Council senior director Dennis Ross.

Reines, who once told a reporter he didn't like to 'f*** off and have a good life', wrote back saying that he would hand it over under three conditions.

He wrote: '1) You in your own voice describe them (Clinton's remarks) as 'muscular'

'2) You note that a look at the CFR seating plan shows that all the envoys — from Holbrooke to Mitchell to Ross — will be arrayed in front of her, which in your own clever way you can say [is] certainly not a coincidence and meant to convey something 3) You don't say you were blackmailed!"

Ambinder responded: 'Ok'.

The article was published later that day and followed Reines' suggestions closely.

It read: 'When you think of President Obama's foreign policy, think of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

JULY 15, 2009 : EMAIL FROM CLINTON AID PHILIPPE REINES TO REPORTER MARC AMBINDER

From: [Philippe Reines]

Sent: Wednesday, July 15 2009 10:06 AM

To: Ambinder, Marc

Subject: Re: Do you have a copy of HRC's speech to share?

3 [conditions] actually

1) You in your own voice describe them as "muscular"

2) You note that a look at the CFR seating plan shows that all the envoys — from Holbrooke to Mitchell to Ross — will be arrayed in front of her, which in your own clever way you can say certainly not a coincidence and meant to convey something

3) You don't say you were blackmailed!

JULY 15, 2009 : MARC AMBINDER'S EMAIL REPLY TO PHILIPPE REINES ONE MINUTER LATER

From: Ambinder, Marc

Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2009 10:07 AM

To: Philippe Reines

Subject: RE: Do you have a copy of HRC's speech to share?

got it

'That's the message behind a muscular speech that Clinton is set to deliver today to the Council on Foreign Relations.

'The staging gives a clue to its purpose: seated in front of Clinton, subordinate to Clinton, in the first row, will be three potentially rival power centers: envoys Richard Holbrooke and George Mitchell, and National Security Council senior director Dennis Ross.'

The emails also reveal that Ambinder fawned over Clinton on other occasions too.

On July 26, 2009 he wrote to Reines: 'She kicked A on MTP (Meet the Press)'.
'

In an email sent on November 29 2010, Ambinder wrote Reines and email titled: 'This is an awesome presser...'
'

JULY 26, 2009: EMAIL FROM MARC AMBINDER TO PHILLIPE REINES

From: Ambinder, Marc

Sent: Sunday, July 26, 2009 12:05 PM

To: Philippe Reines

Subject: she kicked A

on MTP

He wrote: 'She is PITCH f#\$*& PERFECT on this stuff'.

The Atlantic was founded in 1857 and is seen as one of the most venerated magazines in the nation.

It was among the first publications to publish essays by slavery abolitionists in the 1860s and its writers currently include Ta-Nehisi Coates, winner of the MacArthur Award, also known as the 'Genius Grant'.

Ambinder, who is now editor-at-large at The Week magazine, did not return calls and emails asking for comment.

He told Gawker that the email exchange was 'probably at best an incomplete record of what went down'.

November 29, 2010: EMAIL FROM MARC AMBINDER TO PHILLIPE REINES

From: Ambinder, Marc

Sent: Monday, November 29, 2010 12:05 PM

To: Philippe Reines

Subject: This is an awesome presser...

She is PITCH f#\$*& PERFECT on this stuff.

He said: 'That said, the transactional nature of such interactions always gave me the willies.... Since I can't remember the exact exchange I can't really muster up a defense of the art, and frankly, I don't really want to. I will say this: whatever happened here reflects my own decisions, and no one else's.'

In another message he said: 'It made me uncomfortable then, and it makes me uncomfortable today. And when I look at that email record, it is a reminder to me of why I moved away from all that.'

'The Atlantic, to their credit, never pushed me to do that, to turn into a scoop factory. In the fullness of time, any journalist or writer who is confronted by the prospect, or gets in the situation where their journalism begins to feel transactional, should listen to their gut feeling and push away from that.'

'Being scrupulous at all times will not help you get all the scoops, but it will help you sleep at night. At no point at The Atlantic did I ever feel the pressure to make transactional journalism the norm.'

The Gawker emails raise questions over the relationship between Reines and other journalists too.

MARC AMBINDER'S EMAIL AND PHONE COMMENTS TO GAWKER

EMAIL COMMENT: Philippe and I generally spoke on the phone and followed up by email. The exchange is probably at best an incomplete record of what went down. That said, the transactional nature of such interactions always gave me the willies.... Since I can't remember the exact exchange I can't really muster up a defense of the art, and frankly, I don't really want to. I will say this: whatever happened here reflects my own decisions, and no one else's.

PHONE COMMENT: It made me uncomfortable then, and it makes me uncomfortable today. And when I look at that email record, it is a reminder to me of why I moved away from all that. The Atlantic, to their credit, never pushed me to do that, to turn into a scoop factory. In the fullness of time, any journalist or writer who is confronted by the prospect, or gets in the situation where their journalism begins to feel transactional, should listen to their gut feeling and push away from that.

New York magazine used the word 'muscular' in its headline about Clinton's speech and mocked up a picture of her with bodybuilder arms.

Another journalist who wrote a near identical story to Ambinder's was [Mike Allen](#), the top Washington correspondent for Politico.

He too called Clinton's speech 'muscular' and mentioned the seating arrangements in his report.

Allen did not return requests for comment.

A spokesman for Politico said: 'Mike's preview of this speech includes multiple 'aides say' qualifiers and is transparent in that it's based on 'prepared remarks' and a 'seating chart.'"

Another set of emails is between Reines and Dana Hughes, a reporter with ABC News at the time, debunking a report that Clinton had been attacked by bees in Malawi.

Reines wrote: 'One more thing since I'm giving you this gift . . . add a line taking a small poke at 'BuzzFeed and others' for getting this wrong'.

Hughes replied: 'I don't have a problem with that at all'.

Nobody for Clinton was available for comment.

POLITICO

Clinton: 'Clear-eyed' handling of foes

By: [Mike Allen](#)
July 15, 2009 09:27 AM EDT

In a **muscular** first major address as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton warns adversaries on Wednesday that they "should never see America's willingness to talk as a sign of weakness to be exploited."

"We will remain clear-eyed about our purpose," she says in remarks prepared for delivery at the Council on Foreign Relations. "Not everybody in the world wishes us well or shares our values and interests. Some will seek to undermine our efforts. In those cases, our partnerships will help constrain or deter their actions."

"And to these foes and would-be foes, let me say: You should know that our focus on diplomacy and development is not an alternative to our national security arsenal. You should never see America's willingness to talk as a sign of weakness to be exploited. We will not hesitate to defend our friends and ourselves vigorously when necessary with the world's strongest military. This is not an option we seek. Nor is it a threat; it is a promise to the American people."

Laying out the Obama administration's approach to foreign policy, she identifies nonproliferation as a key administration priority.

"We have the right strategy, the right priorities, the right policies. We have the right president," she says in her text. "And we have the American people, diverse, committed, involved and open to the future."

The speech shows how events of Obama's first six months as president have affected administration views and efforts, from Iran to Honduras.

Was he coaxed? Another journalist who wrote a near identical story to Ambinder's was Mike Allen , the top Washington correspondent for Politico. He too called Clinton's speech 'muscular'



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[uy](#), Minnesota, United States, about a minute ago

n evil, vile, disgusting, no-good, pantsuit, muumuu, wearing, lying pos.....

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[by](#), Marxville, 3 minutes ago

! Here's a tip, Hill-----DON'T,whatever you do, mention LBJ, the Voting Rights Act, or Civil Rights Act in South Carolina !!!-----Doesn't play well----the SOUTH don't like that Yankee crap being spoken south of the Mason-Dixon line----GOT IT, Hill ? It cost you against Obama, and this time, the stakes are higher against a horrible, unpatriotic, Trotskyite, Lenin-worshiping SOCIALIST !

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Click to rate  0  0

 Houston, 7 minutes ago

wins the office, I suspect that this kind of control of what and how things are written will be the norm (or else). Still not seeing how that fits in the term: freedom of the Press.

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 Portland, United States, 10 minutes ago

low-information, liberal voter would consider this to be news. Most of us have known that the news media was in bed with liberal politicians for decades.

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 New York, 12 minutes ago

exactly what we have been saying about the media. Go Trump.

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 Simmons, Vegas, United States, 14 minutes ago

intons are a disgrace! Thr only race she should be running is for president of her cell block! #hillaryforprison

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 Libby, Marxville, about a minute ago

Let her go play golf, with the rest of the white-collar crowd.

Click to rate  0  0

 Janta, 16 minutes ago

ne person who hasn't drunk the koolaid would say anything nice about the dragon lady unless under extreme duress.

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