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EXCLUSIVE: New Email Leak Reveals Clinton Campaign's Cozy Press Relationship

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Photo: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

INTERNAL STRATEGY DOCUMENTS and emails among Clinton staffers shed light on friendly and

highly useful relationships between the campaign and various members of the U.S. media, as well as the campaign's strategies for manipulating those relationships.



The emails were provided to The Intercept by the source identifying himself as Guccifer 2.0, who was reportedly responsible for prior significant hacks, including [one](#) that targeted the Democratic National Committee and resulted in the [resignations](#) of its [top four](#) officials. On Friday, Obama administration officials [claimed that](#) Russia's "senior-most officials" were responsible for that hack and others, although they provided no evidence for that assertion.

As these internal documents demonstrate, a central component of the Clinton campaign strategy is ensuring that journalists they believe are favorable to Clinton are tasked to report the stories the campaign wants circulated.

At times, Clinton's campaign staff not only internally drafted the stories they wanted published but even specified what should be quoted "on background" and what should be described as "on the record."

One January 2015 [strategy document](#) – designed to plant stories on Clinton's decision-making process about whether to run for president – singled out reporter Maggie Haberman, then of Politico, now covering the election for the New York Times, as a "friendly journalist" who has "teed up" stories for

them in the past and “never disappointed” them. Nick Merrill, the campaign press secretary, produced the memo, according to the document metadata:



Placing a Story

As discussed on our call, we are all in agreement that the time is right place a story with a friendly journalist in the coming days that positions us a little more transparently while achieving the above goals.

Who:

For something like this, especially in the absence of us teasing things out to others, we feel that it's important to go with what is safe and what has worked in the past, and to a publication that will reach industry people for recruitment purposes.

We have has a very good relationship with Maggie Haberman of Politico over the last year. We have had her tee up stories for us before and have never been disappointed. While we should have a larger conversation in the near future about a broader strategy for reengaging the beat press that covers HRC, for this we think we can achieve our objective and do the most shaping by going to Maggie.

That strategy document plotted how Clinton aides could induce Haberman to write a story on the thoroughness and profound introspection involved in Clinton's decision-making process. The following month, when she was at the Times, Haberman [published](#) two [stories](#) on Clinton's vetting process; in this instance, Haberman's stories were more sophisticated, nuanced, and even somewhat more critical than what the Clinton memo envisioned.

But they nonetheless accomplished the goal Clinton campaign aides wanted to fulfill of casting the appearance of transparency on Clinton's vetting process in a way that made clear she was moving carefully but inexorably toward a presidential run.

Given more than 24 hours to challenge the authenticity of these documents and respond,

Merrill did not reply to our emails. Haberman declined to comment.



Other documents listed those whom the campaign regarded as their most reliable “surrogates” – such as CNN’s Hilary Rosen and Donna Brazile, as well as Center for American Progress President Neera Tanden – but then also listed operatives whom they believed were either good “progressive helpers” or more potentially friendly media figures who might be worth targeting with messaging. The metadata of the [surrogate document](#) shows the file was authored by Jennifer Palmieri, the communications director of the campaign. As [The Intercept previously reported](#), pundits regularly featured on cable news programs were paid by the Clinton campaign without any disclosure when they appeared; several of them are included on this “surrogates” list, including Stephanie Cutter and Maria Cardona:

Progressive Helpers

David Brock
Correct the Record
Mo Ellithe
Judd Legum

Columnist/Pundit Calls

Kiki/Finney Lead - THIS LIST NEEDS WORK, JUST A START
Additional surrogates: Philippe, Podesta, Mills, Joel, Mandy, Jim, Prince, Neera, Lockhart, Joel Johnson, Siewert, Mike Feldman
Dan Balz
Wolf Blitzer
Gloria Borger
Mika Brezinski
David Brooks
Gail Collins
John Dickerson
EJ Dionne
Maureen Dowd
Ronan Farrow
Howard Fineman
Ron Fournier (not sure this is worth it)
Mark Halperin
Chris Hayes
John Heilmann
Jon Karl
John King

Mara Liasson
Rachel Maddow
Ruth Marcus
Chris Mathews
Dana Milbank
Andrea Mitchell
Norah O'Donnell
Robin Roberts
Eugene Robinson
Charlie Rose
April Ryan
George Stephanopoulos
Robin Sproul
Karen Tumulty
Jeff Zeleny



The Clinton campaign likes to use glitzy, intimate, *completely off-the-record* parties between top campaign aides and leading media personalities. One of the most elaborately planned get-togethers was described in an April, 2015, memo – produced, according to the document metadata, by deputy press secretary Jesse Ferguson – to take place shortly before Clinton's official announcement of her candidacy. The event was an April 10 cocktail party for leading news figures and top-level Clinton staff at the Upper East Side home of Clinton strategist Joel Benenson, a fully off-the-record gathering designed to impart the campaign's messaging:

EVENT MEMO

FR: Jesse Ferguson
RE: Benenson's Cocktails on 4.10.15

This is an off-the-record dinner with the key national reporters, especially (though not exclusively) those that are based in New York. Much of the group includes influential reporters, anchors and editors.

The goals of the dinner include:

- (1) Give reporters their first thoughts from team HRC in advance of the announcement
- (2) Setting expectations for the announcement and launch period
- (3) Framing the HRC message and framing the race
- (4) Enjoy a Frida night drink before working more

TIME/DATE: As a reminder, this is called for 6:30 p.m. on Friday, April 10th. There are several attendees – including Diane Sawyer – who will be there promptly at 6:30 p.m. but have to leave by 7 p.m.

REPORTER RSVPs**YES**

1. ABC - Cecilia Vega
2. ABC - David Muir
3. ABC - Diane Sawyer
4. ABC - George Stephanopoulos
5. ABC - Jon Karl
6. Bloomberg - John Heillman
7. Bloomberg - Mark Halperin
8. CBS - Norah O'Donnell
9. CBS - Vicki Gordon
10. CNN - Brianna Keilar
11. CNN - David Chalian
12. CNN - Gloria Borger
13. CNN - Jeff Zeleny
14. CNN - John Berman
15. CNN - Kate Bouldan
16. CNN - Mark Preston
17. CNN - Sam Feist
18. Daily Beast - Jackie Kucinich

19. GPG - Mike Feldman
20. Huffington Post - Whitney Snyder
21. MORE - Betsy Fisher Martin
22. MSNBC - Alex Wagner
23. MSNBC - Beth Fouhy
24. MSNBC - Phil Griffin
25. MSNBC - Rachel Maddow (TBD)
26. MSNBC - Rachel Racusen
27. NBC - Savannah Guthrie
28. New Yorker - Ryan Liza
29. NYT - Amy Chozik
30. NYT - Gail Collins
31. NYT - Jonathan Martin
32. NYT - Maggie Haberman
33. NYT - Pat Healey
34. PEOPLE - Sandra Sobieraj Westfall
35. POLITICO - Glenn Thrush
36. POLITICO - Mike Allen
37. VICE - Alyssa Mastramonoco
38. VOX - Jon Allen

UNKNOWN

1. Bloomberg/MSNBC - Jonathan Alter
2. BuzzFeed - Ben Smith
3. CBS - Gayle King
4. CBS - John Dickerson
5. MSNBC - Ed Schultz
6. MSNBC - Joe Scarborough
7. New Yorker - David Remnick
8. Tina Brown
9. UNIVISION - Maria-Elena Salinas
10. YAHOO - Matt Bai

DECLINED

1. CNN - Jake Taper
2. CNN - Jeff Zucker
3. Huffington Post – Arianna Huffington
4. Huffington Post - Sam Stein
5. NBC - Chuck Todd
6. NYT - Carolyn Ryan
7. CNN – Erin Burnett
8. NPR - Mike Oreskes
9. MSNBC - Mika Brzezinski
10. MSNBC – Thomas Roberts
11. MSNBC - Andrea Mitchell
12. NY Post – Geofe Earl



A separate [email chain](#) between Clinton staff (one that was not among those provided by Guccifer 2.0 but appeared on the DCLeaks.com site earlier this week) contains [plans](#) for a separate off-the-record media get-together in May. Food and drinks were provided by the campaign for the journalists covering it, on the condition that nothing said would be reported to the public.

Many of the enduring Clinton tactics for managing the press were created by the campaign before she even announced her candidacy. A March 13, 2015, [memo](#) from Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook provides insight into some of the tactics employed by the campaign to shape coverage to their liking. In particular, Mook was concerned that because journalists were assigned to cover Clinton, they needed to be fed a constant stream of stories that the campaign liked. As he put it, a key strategy was to “give reporters who must cover daily HRC news something to cover other than the unhelpful stories about the foundation, emails, etc.”

This plan is based on two critical assumptions:

- 1) There is a press corps who has been assigned to cover HRC related news and they will write about her regardless of whether we choose to make news or not.
- 2) It doesn't take much for HRC to make news as we saw with a simple tweet on Iran that got significant coverage.



There are three key strategic objectives during this period:

- 1) Put Republicans on defense and/or force them to take bad positions by engaging in limited ways on policy areas.
- 2) Give reporters who must cover daily HRC news something to cover other than the unhelpful stories about the foundation, emails, etc.
- 3) Show Democratic activists some "fight back" from HRC to create energy and enthusiasm ahead of the launch

The proposed steps come in 5 different tactical groupings:

- 1) Offense on the issues – HRC should be on offense against "The Republican Congress." We don't have a single Republican candidate to oppose, so we should challenge the least popular entity in politics – the Republican Congress – whenever appropriate. There will be times, as with the Iran tweet that it is in our interest to draw in the 2016ers and get them in the record. But, generally, we should not engage directly with them.
- 2) Offense on the process – we know reporters are going to write it, so let's shape the process stories about how the campaign is coming together in staff and strategy, and take start to take advantage of the pressure they face to produce new material when it isn't always available.
- 3) Social media – We want to ramp up HRC's social media activity with simple commentary on articles of note, news of the day, and humor.
- 4) Offense on Republicans Candidates – this is driven by the DNC and American Bridge. We are coordinating the activity with the DNC as best we can.
- 5) Engage Everyday Americans – this will range from off-the-record meetings with real people to social media interaction where HRC engages real people who are featured in the media. This will also include an effort to get supports to write OpEd/Letters/etc. outlining their work with HRC and/or their support for her agenda.

All presidential campaigns have their favorite reporters, try to plant stories they want published, and attempt in multiple ways to curry favor with journalists. These tactics are certainly not unique to the Clinton campaign (liberals were furious in 2008 when journalists went to [John McCain's Arizona ranch for an off-the-record BBQ](#)). But these rituals and dynamics between political campaigns and the journalists who cover them are typically carried out in the dark, despite how significant they can be. These documents provide a valuable glimpse into that process.

Top photo: Hillary Clinton looks at national press secretary Brian Fallon's phone, with aide Huma Abedin and traveling press secretary Nick Merrill.

Excerpts of Hillary Clinton's Paid Speeches to Goldman Sachs Finally Leaked



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