

“Cablegate”: Hillary Clinton’s Email Problem. “Classified Info on Her Secret Server”

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Hillary Clinton’s information pickle is getting bigger by the minute. Those impersonal forces of history are starting to become very personal, tying her to the mishandling of confidential material. The point here was writing and sending emails now deemed classified from a private server. The three releases of State Department emails featuring Clinton were meant to suggest that.

The issue is not as dramatic as it would seem, having been a retrospective decision in intelligence bureaucracy, ever pathological about finding secrets where there are none. The material HRC covered is considered “sensitive” or “classified” depending on the context. (The term used by the State Department is “foreign government information”.)

Emphasis by the critics is placed on Executive Order 13526, an Obama directive that provides that “foreign government information” be treated as classified. Such information would include that “provided to the United States Government by a foreign government or governments, an international organisation of governments, or any element thereof, with the expectation that the information, the source of the information, are to be held in confidence”.

The various exchanges covered in the Clinton assortment cover various foreign dignitaries, and internal exchanges between the State Department about various interactions. Topics are predictably expansive, ranging across the Middle East, Haiti and Sudan.

While Clinton has no doubt been careless, grave mountains are being built out of small molehills. The thrust of Executive Order 13526 is that the discussion of such material damages national security. This bubble reputation nonsense is exactly the sort that must be combated, and while it is hard to feel sympathy with HRC’s cynicism, the hysteria surrounding gradations of information secrecy is unwarranted.

The release by the State Department of a third batch of emails suggested to Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus that, “These new emails show Hillary Clinton exposed even more classified information on her secret server than previously known.”

The anti-HRC consortium are certainly clutching at every bit of gossip on the email issue. Substance here is less important than the form of secrecy. Shannen W. Coffin of the National Review seems delighted that Tony Blair had knowledge of “Clinton’s private-email account before the American people did”. Coffin, without adducing any evidence of damage or disruption, simply sticks to that old fable that all diplomatic relations be kept secret. Ours not to reason why.

The entire farce about how Clinton has stumbled on this has a certain frisson to it. There

have been others who bungled on the issue of misaligning information discussed in an official capacity with private pursuits. General David Petraeus, touted as potential presidential material, ended up falling foul of sharing confidential information with his researching confidante. Where there is sex, there is information release, and much else besides.

The political assault HRC is bearing witness to may not necessarily dint her chances at the Oval office. She is still considerably ahead of the GOP camp, and is keeping a low profile. "The Clinton campaign," Jason Easley argues, "is going with a slow burn strategy, because they want voters to get excited in 2016." [1]

When dealing with the Clintons, one is not so much dealing with individual agency as that of a machine organised around the most modern, chameleon like techniques of evasion. Lies become sugared half-truths; sanctimony filtrates through the press releases, assuming the form of "common America". For the Clintons, the only America worth knowing is a corrupt one punctuated by occasional acts of contrition.

The Democrat charges are holding on, hoping that the Clinton machine will prevail. This is what they are used to, what their bruising scandals have done to it over the years. As Charles P. Pierce pointed out in *Esquire*, "The pursuit of a Clinton makes for terrific television and a compelling 'narrative', and that is all that matters." [2]

An important aside in all of this stands out. A fundamental contradiction to information security exists in Clinton's approach and that of the State Department. Nothing illustrates this better than the reaction to Cablegate. With the release of the cables, Clinton was implicated in an assortment of revelations touching on, among others, targeting UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, insisting in the process that biometric information of UN officials be collected. This would also involve credit card details, email addresses, frequent flyer accounts, and phone numbers. [3]

Wikileaks, in its publishing activities, effectively exposed a tension. What should be published? What should be kept confidential? National security reporter for the *New York Times*, Scott Shane, was happy to make a prediction to State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley. In a message to Crowley on November 28, 2010, Shane doubted that WikiLeaks "is going to dump 250k cables on the web any time soon." [4] Crowley was thrilled by the erroneous tip-off, spreading it like confetti in the department and deeming it, "Potentially great news."

This turned out to be nonsense. The cables were released, and the pro-secrecy eagles in the State Department and the HRC camp recoiled in horror. Clinton's chief strategist during her 2008 campaign, Mark Penn, wrote Clinton in disgust that, "No State department can operate if it can't keep its own classified cables and internal orders confidential - I think this is unprecedented in history."

Penn proceeded to suggest "a bounty for the capture of those responsible." The email was shared with Clinton's chief of staff, Cheryl Mills. The US diplomatic security complex went apoplectic. Secrecy and protocols of confidentiality, it seems, are only deemed appropriate for some.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.politicususa.com/2015/09/02/email-scandal-means-hillary-clinton-remains-popular-but-trump.html>

[2] <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/news/a37593/hillary-didnt-send-classified-material-but-it-was-sensitive/>

[3] <https://news.vice.com/article/hillary-clintons-bleak-week-emails-show-response-to-wikileaks-revelations>

[4] https://news.vice.com/article/hillary-clintons-bleak-week-emails-show-response-to-wikileaks-revelations?utm_source=vicenewstwitter

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