

Hillary Clinton's Energy Initiative Pressured Countries to Embrace Fracking, New Emails Reveal

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Back in April, just before the New York primary, Hillary Clinton's campaign [aired a commercial](#) on upstate television stations touting her work as secretary of state forcing "China, India, some of the world's worst polluters" to make "real change." She promised to "stand firm with New Yorkers opposing fracking, giving communities the right to say 'no.'"

The television spot, which was not announced and does not appear on the official campaign YouTube [page](#) with most of Clinton's other ads, implied a history of opposition to fracking, here and abroad. But emails obtained by *The Intercept* from the Department of State reveal new details of behind-the-scenes efforts by Clinton and her close aides to export American-style hydraulic fracturing — the horizontal drilling technique best known as fracking — to countries all over the world.

Far from challenging fossil fuel companies, the emails obtained by *The Intercept* show that State Department officials worked closely with private sector oil and gas companies, pressed other agencies within the Obama administration to commit federal government resources including technical assistance for locating shale reserves, and distributed agreements with partner nations pledging to help secure investments for new fracking projects.



The documents also reveal the department's role in bringing foreign dignitaries to a fracking [site](#) in Pennsylvania, and its plans to make Poland a "[laboratory](#) for testing whether US success in developing shale gas can be repeated in a different country," particularly in Europe, where local governments had expressed opposition and in some cases [even banned fracking](#).

The [campaign included plans](#) to spread the drilling technique to China, South Africa, Romania, Morocco, Bulgaria, Chile, India, Pakistan, Argentina, Indonesia, and Ukraine.

In 2014, *Mother Jones* reporter Mariah Blake used diplomatic cables disclosed by WikiLeaks and other records to [uncover](#) how Clinton "sold fracking to the world." The emails obtained by *The Intercept* through a separate Freedom of Information Act request provide a new layer of detail.

The Clinton campaign did not respond to a request for comment. During the April 15 [Democratic debate](#) in Brooklyn, New York, Clinton insisted there was no inconsistency between her positions:

Q: OK. Secretary Clinton, as secretary of state, you also pioneered a program to promote fracking around the world, as you described. Fracking, of course, a way of extracting natural gas. Now as a candidate for president, you say that by the time you're done with all your rules and regulations, fracking will be restricted in many places around the country. Why have you changed your view on fracking?

CLINTON: No, well, I don't think I've changed my view on what we need to do to go from where we are, where the world is heavily dependent on coal and oil, but principally coal, to where we need to be, which is clean renewable energy, and one of the bridge fuels is natural gas. And so for both economic and environmental and strategic reasons, it was American policy to try to help countries get out from under the constant use of coal, building coal plants all the time, also to get out from under, especially if they were in Europe, the pressure from Russia, which has been incredibly intense. So we did say natural gas is a bridge. We want to cross that bridge as quickly as possible, because in order to deal with climate change, we have got to move as rapidly as we can.

Industry-Backed Launch

The Global Shale Gas Initiative, Clinton's program for promoting fracking, was announced on April 7, 2010, by David Goldwyn, the State Department's special envoy for energy affairs, at the United States Energy Association (USEA), whose [members](#) include Chevron, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, and Shell.

In a widely covered event in Krakow three months later, Clinton [announced](#) that "Poland will be part of the Global Shale Gas Initiative," and that the State Department would "provide technical and other assistance."

Goldwyn, who did not respond to multiple requests for comment, spoke to *National Journal* last month, explaining that, "[Clinton's] instruction to me was that it was OK to talk about helping other countries get access to their own resources, as long as the focus of our engagement was how they could do it safely and efficiently, and that's why the program had almost an entirely regulatory focus." Goldwyn emphasized that the shale gas initiative was not designed to help the private sector and instead should be seen as "a really very modest government-to-government."

But the emails show an aggressive effort to engage private energy companies and use Poland as part of a larger campaign to sell fracking throughout the region.

An email dated December 3, 2010, shows that the State Department had Poland firmly in its bull's-eye and that companies such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Marathon Oil, Canadian firm BNK Petroleum and Italian energy company Eni [expressed interest](#) in tapping into Polish shale. One official [suggested](#) "enlisting Eni" to help organize the pro-fracking campaign in Poland, as well as bringing in U.S. companies. Earlier that year, in April, Poland's then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Radoslaw Sikorski also took a trip to Texas to visit a fracking production site.

"I think we should be open to working with the Poles to spread knowledge and understanding of Poland's (and Europe's) shale gas potential," [wrote](#) the State Department's Chuck Ashley, who now works in the Office of the U.S. Ambassador to Israel.

"Poland," Ashley wrote, "is a laboratory for testing whether US success in developing shale

gas can be repeated in a different country, with different shales, and a different regulatory environment.” Ashley also noted that “popular and political support is strong now, but this could change when shale gas wells come to their backyards.”

In fact, that did change. As drilling rigs transformed from prospect to reality, Polish citizens attempted — as it turns out, successfully — to [fend off companies](#) interested in fracking in Poland, [including Chevron](#). A group called [Occupy Chevron](#) formed in reaction to the potential for shale drilling in Poland and Chevron [filed](#) a lawsuit against the occupiers. Facing the backlash and low global oil prices, in January 2015, Chevron announced it would [halt operations in Poland](#).

Public-Private Partnerships

Despite Goldwyn’s recent assertion that the fracking campaign was a modest effort, the emails show what Goldwyn referred to as a “whole of government” approach that included deploying assistance from a range of agencies. At least [13](#) different government agencies were part of the effort.

Take Morocco, for example. A joint program with Clinton’s Global Shale Gas Initiative and the State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) event for visiting Moroccans involved several U.S. government federal agencies in the proceedings. [That included](#) the EPA, National Security Council, USTDA, USGS, BLM, FERC and the [Commercial Law Development Program](#).

After signing the agreement, Moroccan officials visited the U.S. for a series of meetings with the National Security Council, U.S. Trade and Development Agency, Bureau of Land Management, along with meetings with the American Gas Association and America’s Natural Gas Alliance, a lobbying group for the largest American fracking companies.

The emails reveal that the NSC had a “[biweekly shale gas call](#)” in which it offered the State Department its input on Global Shale Gas Initiative priority countries.

Moving Forward

The Global Shale Gas Initiative eventually became enveloped in the broader and still-existing [Bureau of Energy Resources](#), a special wing within the Department of State devoted to the geopolitics of energy. “You can’t talk about our economy or foreign policy without talking about energy,” Clinton said, announcing the [new bureau](#) in 2011.

The office, staffed by [85 people](#), focuses on a range of energy development, but with a special focus on unconventional gas development and infrastructure, such as fracking and liquefied natural gas terminals, to support the development of the international gas market.

Now called the [Unconventional Gas Technical Engagement Program](#), the Global Shale Gas Initiative lives on under Secretary of State John Kerry (though they’ve [taken down the website](#)) but with the prospect of a commercial-scale global shale gas boom greatly reduced. Only the [U.S., Canada, Argentina and China](#) have commercialized the controversial horizontal drilling technique.

The pause in fracking, however, might be momentary. A number of energy companies that worked closely with the State Department now employ lobbyists that are fundraising furiously for Clinton’s campaign. ExxonMobil’s top lobbyist, as well as lobbyists for liquefied

natural gas terminals designed to connect the U.S. to the global gas market, are [among](#) the most prolific fundraisers.

Goldwyn, too, is still actively promoting similar policies in the private sector through his [consulting](#) company Goldwyn Global Strategies, as counsel to the energy [lobbying firm](#) Sutherland Asbill & Brennan, and through his association with the Atlantic Council, a think tank that [promotes](#) fossil fuel development.

The State Department's shale gas initiative "was clearly driven by the promotion of Big Oil's expansion," Charlie Cray, senior researcher at Greenpeace USA, told *The Intercept*. "That it was one of State's highest priorities undermines their credibility as leaders in the global effort to prevent the calamitous threats of climate change."

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