

# Clinton's Imperious Brush-off of Email Rules

**Exclusive:** The State Department's Inspector General issued a blunt report criticizing Hillary Clinton's imperious refusal to follow email rules as Secretary of State, adding to Clinton's credibility problem, notes ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

State Department functionaries faced a hopeless task as they tried to spin their own Inspector General's matter-of-fact critique of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's imperial attitude toward basic security measures everyone else is required by law to follow.

It turns out that she deliberately chose to use a hacker-friendly, unprotected email server, and not so much for convenience – unless you define “convenience” as the ability to operate in total secrecy with no possibility of being held accountable for your policies or behavior. In one email to an aide, Clinton explained, “I don't want any risk of the personal being accessible.”

When some staffers had the temerity to voice concerns over the vulnerability of a non-governmental email system, they were warned by their seniors “never to speak of the Secretary's personal email system again.” The IG report establishes that Clinton's claim that her use of an insecure email system for official business had been “allowed” is, well, disingenuous.

Pity the State Department spokespeople tasked with putting the best face on the IG's stark criticism. Media representatives actually posed some direct questions to those applying the cosmetics, who showed themselves far more guilty than Socrates in “trying to make the worst case the better.” At several points, I sensed them wishing some hemlock came in their job jar.

Just doing their job, I know. But it was bizarrely clear that their instructions included taking a bullet for Secretary Clinton. It wasn't really her fault, you see. It was actually the State Department's fault, collectively. There were only a few variations on the meme: “We could have done a better job ensuring that people understand security policies;” “We could have done a better job at preserving emails;” “We have not lived up to all our obligations.” In other words, “we” failed the Secretary, not that Clinton failed in her duty to ensure that government information was properly secure.

I counted no fewer than 15 examples of this kind of self-criticism, and it was more than a little nauseating. But then, again, if Clinton becomes President,

who wants to be assigned to be deputy chief of mission in Upper Slobovia? It was encouraging as it was heartening to notice that this time the press corps was not sitting still for the notion that it wasn't really Clinton's fault, after all.

The fly in the ointment preventing the usual careful orchestration of such announcements was an early leak of the IG report. Worse still, for the State Department spokespeople, several of the journalists had actually read the report and noticed that its declarative prose did not square with the collective self-flagellation serving as a diversion. Even the mainstream press corps could see through the transparent attempt to direct the public lashes onto a group of whipping boys and girls to spare the ex-Secretary and likely Democratic presidential nominee.

Again, some pity is in order for the briefers. It was not supposed to go down this way. Clearly, the State Department had intended to disclose the IG report this (Friday) afternoon to those few unlucky enough to be still around before the Memorial Day weekend. No doubt the spokespersons fully expected to have an extra day to do the homework required to be more plausible in the squaring-a-circle task they were given. The task would have been quite difficult with even a week to prepare.

### **Small Miracle**

Opening my Washington Post, I encountered another surprise. For the first time since our Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity began writing corporate Memoranda for the President, the Post and VIPS were of one mind on something important.

The editors of the Post do not let us onto their pages, of course. But apparently they did read our open appeal to President Obama three days ago urging his administration to wind up the email investigation as quickly as possible and let the country know *now* what the FBI has learned – before the Democratic nomination is locked in. Where else would they have gotten such a good idea?

In the print edition, the Post lead editorial's headline reads: "Ms. Clinton's willful misjudgments: She repeatedly ignored warnings not to use private email during her tenure as secretary of state." The online headline reads: "'Clinton's inexcusable, willful disregard for the rules.'" The editorial ends with the recommendation: "We urge the FBI to finish its own investigation soon, so all information about this troubling episode will be before the voters."

In the Post's news columns, a report on the IG findings runs as the page-one

lede under the headline "State Department watchdog rebukes Clinton over email: No approval sought for private server," undercutting Clinton's argument that her decision to operate an email tied to her home-based server "was permitted" by the State Department. Too early to tell, of course, but Ms. Clinton may begin to worry that the editorial page editors, who until now have enthroned her as their favorite neocon, may be getting wobbly.

Same goes for The New York Times, which led its Thursday editions with a factual report and included two articles on page A14, one of which includes a rebuttal of the lame demurral put out by the Clinton campaign. The take-no-prisoners headline of the other article by Amy Chozick is: "Emails Add to Hillary Clinton's Central Problem: Voters Just Don't Trust Her."

Chozick points out that Secretary Clinton refused to be interviewed by the Inspector General as part of the security review and, in effect, questions Clinton's insistence that the voters don't care about the email controversy. Noting Clinton's very high unfavorable opinion rating, Chozik notes that when voters are asked why they do not trust Ms. Clinton, "Again and again they will answer with a single word: Emails."

As Sir Walter Scott observed in a memorable poem:

*Oh what a tangled web we weave,*

*When first we practice to deceive!*

Or as one might add in the context of modern politics:

*But when we've practiced for a while,*

*We markedly improve our style*

Secretary Clinton faces an immense task in trying to improve her style. A judgment on how well she's doing may be recorded by the voters in the California primary on June 7.

**Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He served as an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer and then as a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years, and is familiar with the damage that inevitably occurs when people with access to classified information are dismissive of the need to protect it from unauthorized disclosure.**

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# Some Light in Iraq's Dark Tunnel

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 blasted apart the country's political structure and left behind widespread chaos, but Iraqis may be slowly digging out of the wreckage, says ex-CIA official Graham E. Fuller.

By Graham E. Fuller

Iraqi politics are in turmoil – nothing new here. Not surprisingly, the post-invasion order is taking a long time to shake down, given the destruction of the old. Entirely new relationships had to be forged under the new, radically changed environment.

What Iraq requires above all is the painful creation of a new sense of national identity and unity. That poses demands on both Shi'a and Sunni. Ironically, much of the Shi'ite – and even Sunni – religious establishment seem to be closer to a national vision than politicians who are pursuing narrow party agendas.

The Shi'a have not handled the post-Saddam situation well. As the numerical majority, the Shi'a quickly moved to ensure their electoral dominance over the political order after Saddam Hussein and have sidelined the once-ruling Sunnis from a major voice in governance. Worse, Shi'ite militias have behaved harshly against Sunni communities in an effort to reduce Sunni power and even to avenge the past. This very Shi'ite heavy-handedness is one reason why some Iraqi Sunnis have lent support to the "Islamic State" (ISIS, or Da'ish) with its militantly anti-Shi'ite policies.

This anti-Sunni bias of two successive Shi'ite administrations is both unacceptable and damaging to the country. Regrettably, it is also understandable – partially. After centuries-long exclusion from any meaningful role in Sunni-dominated Iraq and suffering oppression at the hands of the Sunni state, the Shi'a seized the moment after the fall of Saddam to ensure that their newly-won power via elections could never again be taken away from them.

Their fear was real: large segments of the Sunni population have viewed recent Shi'ite rule in Baghdad – the seat of great Sunni power for long centuries – as somehow something illegitimate, perhaps even transient. Saudi Arabia refused to even recognize the new Iraqi government for six years (even though Riyadh also hated Saddam) because it perceived the new Shi'ite-dominated Iraq as some kind of an artificial creation propped up by Iran.

That view has to change. The Sunnis of the region, and particularly Iraqi Sunnis, are going to have to suck up the new reality and acknowledge that yes,

this is a major geopolitical turning point in the traditional sectarian balance of power in the Gulf. But Iraq is still Iraq, and once it stabilizes, it will play a new, albeit more complex role in the region.

And to the extent that this new reality becomes accepted in the region, the grounds for Iraqi Shi'a paranoia and the sidelining of Sunnis in governance should diminish.

### **A Big Thing**

This is a big thing – we're talking about the very identity of the new Iraq – historically Sunni in the regional power equation. But now its Shi'ite element is strong. So what is it then that defines an Iraqi – or a Shi'ite? After all, like all human beings, Shi'a possess more identities than simply being Shi'a all day long.

When sectarian identity in Iraq has been a matter of life or death, or the denied Shi'a political or economic well-being over long periods, of course the sectarian identity has dominated. As things calm, however, other facets of identity will emerge.

Shi'a themselves are diverse. They come from different regions of the country. Some are secular while some are religious, some are conservative, others are liberal or socialist, some are rich, some are poor, some are businessmen, some are laborers. Some favor Iran, some don't. And personality clashes among them abound.

Sooner or later these multiple diversities should make up the natural stuff of Iraqi domestic politics like anywhere else. Sunni businessmen or bankers or socialists or engineers or farmers can make common cause with their Shi'ite counterparts – out of common interest. But we are not quite there yet.

Lately some interesting things have been happening. First, there have been strong demands from many Iraqis, and especially within the Shi'ite community itself, for a government of technocrats to replace the often incompetent and corrupt politicians currently in power.

Politicians can never be kept out of politics, but a more balanced and competent technocratic government would go a long way towards restoring confidence among many Iraqis, and especially among the Sunnis. And, if Shi'ite politicians think about it, they will want their voices to predominate over a *united* Iraq, not a partitioned Iraq. So they've got to run the country for the benefit of all Iraqis, or there will be no united Iraq to preside over. The country could even split apart.

Second, some key elements of the Shi'ite clergy are often more enlightened than their political counterparts. The impassioned young cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, bane of the U.S. occupation, is back yet again. Often mercurial, he also has a huge loyal following including a militia; his power and reputation rest particularly upon the impeccable clerical and nationalist credentials of his famed clerical father and uncle – both murdered by Saddam.

More to the point though, Muqtada has regularly demonstrated streaks of broader Iraqi nationalism even within his sectarian power base. He has spoken for all of Iraq against the U.S. occupation; he believes in a united Iraq and not just a Shi'ite Iraq. Lately he has made remarks critical of Iran, a country that has often offered him refuge in the past and has supported him with funding and weapons.

But Muqtada is his own man, and he is making it clear that Iraq, while grateful to Iran for all its help over the years, cannot let Iran run Iraq; Iraq must be independent and sovereign.

This development was in the cards. Indeed, in my book with Rend Rahim Francke (*The Arab Shi'a*, 2001), we underscored, even before Saddam fell, the latent tensions between Iran and Iraq. One country is Arab, the other is Persian; even their Shi'ite cultures demonstrate different colorations.

*Iraq* is historically the center of global Shi'ism, not Iran. Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani in Iraq is the most important Shi'ite cleric in the world who has long spoken in the name of Iraq, not in the name of Shi'ite power.

And over the longer run Arab Shi'ia in the Gulf are more likely to look to Arab Iraq for support rather than to Iran. The two countries are destined to be rivals in the Gulf in the future; indeed the outlines of some of that rivalry are beginning to make themselves evident. Interestingly, the once very large Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, for the time being in momentary eclipse, also has a national Iraqi view more than a Sunni one.

What kind of a leadership role in the region will Iraq's complex new mixed Shi'ite/Sunni character play? It will have to be an *Iraqi* outlook, and not a sectarian outlook. In the past Sunni-led Iraq played a powerful role in the pan-Arab nationalist movement. Even today Iraqi Shi'a will not cease being Arab. But where will their natural allies in the Arab world lie?

It's still going to take a while for Iraq to shake down. ISIS alone is a deep source of conflict and instability. Worse, Saudi Arabia's militant anti-Shi'ite campaign is highly destabilizing across the region. The Kurds are still negotiating their place in a new Iraq while Turkish foreign policies have now

grown erratic. Syria is utterly unresolved. All these conflicts raging around Iraq make it hard for any country to settle down to stable politics.

Based on several of these straws in the wind though, Iraq may slowly be coming to acknowledge the lose-lose character of its present sectarian politics. Sadly, many of its political leaders are in it for themselves as much as for sectarian ideology.

But the Shi'a's existential fears may now be slowly ebbing, especially if ISIS is defeated. And Iran itself may realize the need to tread cautiously in Iraq lest they lose major influence in a backlash against them.

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