



Clinton email on Saudi Arabia's support of ISIS deeply troubling

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In perhaps what may be one of the biggest “ifs” in foreign affairs, “if” the email revealed this week by Wikileaks by Democratic presidential candidate and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to campaign chairman John Podesta is legitimate, then it raises three deeply troubling issues.



(<https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RTSRUFK-e1476384834697.jpg>)

REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson.

[In the email](https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/3774) (<https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/3774>), dating to August 2014 just two months after ISIS overran Mosul, Clinton sends John Podesta a nine-point, multi-paragraph policy memo of what the US needs to do in the Middle East to counter ISIS. According to the memo itself, sources for the information “include Western intelligence, US intelligence and sources in the region.”

It is not clear that Clinton wrote the plan herself; it [shares a similar format](http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/10/hillary-in-leaked-email-saudi-arabia-and-qatar-are-funding-isis/) (<http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/10/hillary-in-leaked-email-saudi-arabia-and-qatar-are-funding-isis/>) to memos and reports sent to her by her adviser Sidney Blumenthal. Further, the doubling up of the greater-than-signs in the email also suggests she may have simply forwarded the policy memo while stripping out the original sender's information.

Nevertheless, the first troubling issue relates to the passage of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA). As I [previously wrote](https://www.aei.org/publication/jasta-sincere-effort-hold-saudi-arabia-accountable/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/jasta-sincere-effort-hold-saudi-arabia-accountable/>), though potentially problematic if other countries pass similar legislation,

JASTA represents a sincere effort to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its involvement in terrorism over the past three decades...it is beyond doubt that Saudi Arabia funded Salafist mosques around the world, with many of those mosques housing imams who preached a radical version of Islam.

The policy memo contains a line

we need to use our diplomatic and more traditional intelligence assets to bring pressure on the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, **which are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL and other radical Sunni groups** in the region [emphasis added].

This information, if true, raises the possibility that JASTA could allow Americans whose relatives were killed or who were injured in attacks in Paris, Brussels, San Bernardino, Orlando, and every other ISIS directed, enabled, and inspired attack to sue both Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Whether those suits are successful is still another question, but nonetheless [discussions among policymakers of limiting JASTA to the 9/11 attack](http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/29/politics/obama-911-veto-congressional-concerns/) (<http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/29/politics/obama-911-veto-congressional-concerns/>) now must consider this "new" information.

The second and, more troubling, issue with the email is that if Clinton wrote it herself, it may be evidence that Clinton sent classified information over an insecure email network to an individual lacking a security clearance. Details of the Saudi and Qatari governments' clandestine funding of ISIS would likely only exist in a classified space within the US government. If Clinton wrote that based on what she remembered from classified briefings during her time at the Department of State (or if she continued to maintain a clearance and receive such briefings after she left State), then she carelessly or knowingly disclosed classified information.

To illustrate my point, it's always fun to discuss current events with a former government official who only recently left public service: before speaking, the careful ones always hesitate as the gears turn in their head and they try to figure out whether what they're about to say is classified or not.

With [so much of the focus on whether Clinton sent or received classified documents](http://www.nationalreview.com/article/440380/obama-email-alias-clinton-why-fbi-didnt-prosecute-hillary) (<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/440380/obama-email-alias-clinton-why-fbi-didnt-prosecute-hillary>) using her personal server, far less attention has been paid to whether she disclosed classified information verbally or in writing. This email tends to show that she did, which is a federal offense. Again, Clinton needs to expressly disavow the email or detail how she came to know about Saudi Arabia's "financial and logistics support" of ISIS. If this email is legitimate, Clinton has harmed America's national security by not only placing Saudi Arabia in legal jeopardy, but also risking our intelligence sources and methods, which could potentially be revealed and compromised by discovery conducted during lawsuits under JASTA.

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Finally, should Clinton win the presidential election, this email, if not repudiated, could make her a witness in a JASTA lawsuit. Imagine the years of turmoil and instability such an occurrence would have on our intelligence, diplomatic activities, and her presidency. To be clear, I am not making a political case against Clinton's candidacy; rather, I am merely pointing out a likely problem this email could cause because Clinton appears to have sent classified information over an insecure email network.

If critics thought JASTA posed potential problems for America before this email came out, those problems are minor compared to the implications raised by Clinton's alleged email.

Learn more: [JASTA is a sincere effort to hold Saudi Arabia accountable](https://www.aei.org/publication/jasta-sincere-effort-hold-saudi-arabia-accountable/)
(<https://www.aei.org/publication/jasta-sincere-effort-hold-saudi-arabia-accountable/>) |
[Accepting the risk of a terrorist attack would be un-American](https://www.aei.org/publication/accepting-risk-terrorist-attack-would-be-un-american/)
(<https://www.aei.org/publication/accepting-risk-terrorist-attack-would-be-un-american/>) |
[New national terrorism strategy a step in the right direction](https://www.aei.org/publication/new-national-terrorism-strategy-a-step-in-the-right-direction/)
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