

Clinton Email Investigation Timeline

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The Hidden Smoking Gun: the Combetta Cover-Up

Timeline research makes sense of the confusing story of how Clinton's emails got deleted, and the ensuing cover-up.

written by Paul Thompson, with illustrative work by Katie Weddington

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Since April 2016, I've worked with a team of people to put together the [most detailed timeline on the Clinton email controversy](#) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/category/clinton-email-server/timeline-long/>). With this in-depth knowledge of the issue, one recently revealed event stands out as the most important "smoking gun" so far that isn't getting nearly the attention it deserves: the [deletion and wiping of Clinton's emails](#) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/deletion-of-clintons-emails/>) in March 2015. This essay draws on the timeline to put together what is publicly known, revealing aspects that

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have been completely overlooked. The evidence points to destruction of evidence by people working for Hillary Clinton.



PLATTE RIVER
networks

Platte River Logo (Credit:
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To understand the [2015 deletions](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/deletion-of-clintons-emails/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/deletion-of-clintons-emails/>), we have to start further back in time, in **June 2013**. Clinton had [ended her four-year tenure as secretary of state](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/808/2013/02/01/clintons-four-year-tenure-as-secretary-of-state-ends/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/808/2013/02/01/clintons-four-year-tenure-as-secretary-of-state-ends/>) earlier in **2013**, and [she hired](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/789/2013/01/01/january-2013-may-31-2013-clinton-uses-an-agent-to-find-new-management-for-her-private-server/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/789/2013/01/01/january-2013-may-31-2013-clinton-uses-an-agent-to-find-new-management-for-her-private-server/>) the [Platte River Networks \(PRN\)](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/platte-river-networks/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/platte-river-networks/>) computer company to manage her private email server. This was a puzzling hire, to say the least, because PRN was based in Denver, Colorado, far from Clinton's homes in New York and Washington, DC, and the [company was so small that their office was actually an apartment in an ordinary apartment building](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1518/2015/08/18/clintons-private-server-has-recently-been-managed-by-a-surprisingly-small-company-with-no-special-security-features/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1518/2015/08/18/clintons-private-server-has-recently-been-managed-by-a-surprisingly-small-company-with-no-special-security-features/>) with no security alarm system. The company wasn't cleared to handle classified information, nobody in it had a security clearance, and it hadn't even handled an important out of state contract before.

PRN assigned two employees to handle the Clinton account: [Paul Combettta](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/paul-combettta/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/paul-combettta/>) and [Bill Thornton](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/bill-thornton/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/bill-thornton/>). In **late June 2013**, these two employees moved Clinton's server from her house in Chappaqua, New York, [to an Equinix data center in Secaucus, New Jersey](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9788/2013/06/01/clintons-server-is-relocated-and-then-replaced-by-a-new-server-but-the-old-server-keeps-running/).

(<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9788/2013/06/01/clintons-server-is-relocated-and-then-replaced-by-a-new-server-but-the-old-server-keeps-running/>) They removed all the data from the server, moved it to a new server, and then wiped the old server clean. Both the new and old server were kept running at the data center. At the same time, [PRN subcontracted Datto, Inc.](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/datto-inc/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/datto-inc/>), to back up the data on the new server. A [Datto SIRIS S2000 was bought and connected to the server](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/datto-siris-s2000/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/datto-siris-s2000/>), functioning like an external hard drive to make periodic back-ups.



The original Clinton server is an Apple Power Macintosh G4 (left) and it was replaced by the Dell Power Edge 2900 (right). (Credit: public domain)

Clinton's emails get sorted

Fast forward to the **middle of 2014**. The House Benghazi Committee was formed (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/961/2014/05/08/the-house-benghazi-committee-is-formed-in-order-to-investigate-the-us-governments-response-to-the-2012-terrorist-attacks-in-benghazi-libya/>) to investigate the US government's actions surrounding the **2012** terrorist attack in Benghazi, Libya (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/libya/>), and soon a handful of emails were discovered relating to this attack (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/963/2014/05/09/shortly-after-may-8-2014-the-state-department-looks-for-clintons-emails-but-only-find-a-few-all-belonging-to-a-private-email-account/>) involving Clinton's **hdr22@clintonemail.com** email address. At this point, nobody outside of Clinton's inner circle of associates knew she had exclusively used that private email account for all her email communications while she was secretary of state, or that she'd hosted it on her own private email server.

The Benghazi Committee (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/house-benghazi-committee/>) began pressing the State Department (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/state-department/>) for more relevant emails from Clinton. The State Department in turn began privately pressing Clinton to turn over (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/970/2014/07/01/july-2014-some-state-department-officials-figure-out-that-clinton-used-a-private-email-on-a-private-server-for-all-her-secretary-of-state-work-they-informally-ask-her-for-her-emails/>) all her work-related emails.



Cheryl Mills (left) David Kendall (center) and Heather Samuelson
(Credit: public domain)

Instead of turning over all her emails, Clinton decided to have them sorted into work-related and personal, and then only turn over the work-related ones. She gave this task to three of her lawyers (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/979/2014/07/23/clintons-associates-are-given-clintons-emails-so-they-can-begin-sorting-them/>): Cheryl Mills (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/cheryl-mills/>) (Clinton's former chief of staff), David Kendall (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/david-kendall/>) (Clinton's longtime personal lawyer), and Heather Samuelson (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/heather-samuelson/>) (a relatively inexperienced State Department staffer during Clinton's tenure). It seems Samuelson did most of the sorting (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10227/2014/07/31/heather-samuelson-one-of-clintons-lawyers-allegedly-leads-the-sorting-of-over-60000-of-clintons-emails/>), even though she had no experience for this task nor any security clearance (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1036/2014/07/31/late-2014-clinton-and-her-lawyers-keep-about-half-of-her-emails-from-her-time-as-secretary-of-state-and-delete-the-rest/>).

It was decided that over 50,000 emails were work-related, and those were turned over to the State Department (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1028/2014/12/05/50000-pages-of-printed-emails-from-clintons-personal-account-are-delivered-to-the-state-department-by-clintons-staff/>) on December 5, 2014. These have all since been publicly released, though with redactions. Another over 31,000 emails were deemed personal (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/31830-deleted-emails/>), and Clinton kept those. They were later deleted in controversial circumstances that this essay explores in detail.

It has become increasingly clear in recent months that this sorting process was highly flawed. Clinton has said any emails that were borderline cases were given to the State Department, just to be on the safe side. But in fact, the FBI later recovered about 17,500 of Clinton's "personal" emails (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9846/2016/09/02/the-fbi-says-they-recovered-over-17000-of-clintons-missing-emails-but-its-unclear-how-many-of-these-are-work-related/>). It is probable no government agency has yet gone through all of these to officially determine which ones were work-related and which ones were not, but FBI Director James Comey (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/james-comey/>) has said that "thousands (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/6720/2016/07/05/fbi-director-comey-announces-he-will-not-recommend-clintons-indictment-on-any-charge-but-he-calls-her-extremely-careless-in-handling-highly-classified-information/>)" were work-related.



Huma Abedin (Credit: Melissa Golden / Redux)

We can get a glimpse of just how flawed the sorting process was because hundreds of emails from Huma Abedin (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/huma-abedin/>) have been released in recent months, as part of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1820/2016/01/11/emails-from-top-clinton-aide-huma-abedin-will-be-released-in-batches/>). Abedin was Clinton's deputy chief of staff and still is one of her closest aides.

When Samuelson described the sorting process in her FBI interview (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10227/2014/07/31/heather-samuelson-one-of-clintons-lawyers-allegedly-leads-the-sorting-of-over-60000-of-clintons-emails/>), she said that her first step was to find all the emails to or from Clinton and the people she regularly worked with in the State Department, and put all of those emails in the "work-related" category.

But from the Abedin emails released so far, about 200 are previously unreleased emails between her and Clinton (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/5171/2016/06/29/at-least-160-of-clintons-work-emails-have-turned-up-since-clinton-said-she-turned-them-all-over/>). Anyone who looks at these can see that the vast majority, if not all, of them are work-related. Many involve Abedin's **state.gov** government address, not her **clintonemail.com** private address, so how on Earth did Samuelson's sorting process miss those? It has even come to light recently that a small number of emails mentioning "Benghazi" have been found in the 17,500 recovered by the FBI, but Samuelson told the FBI (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10227/2014/07/31/heather-samuelson-one-of-clintons->)

The Hidden Smoking Gun (the Clinton Email Scandal) / Clinton's emails / she had specifically searched for all emails using that word.

The Abedin emails released so far

UNCLASSIFIED U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2015-06322
Obtained via FOIA by Judicial Watch.

From: H [HDR22@clintonemail.com]
Sent: Friday, July 31, 2009 6:13:25 AM
To: Huma Abedin; 'abedinh@state.gov'
Subject: Schedule

Can we start Saudi 15 minutes later so I don't have to leave the WH early?

A sample of an email between Clinton and Abedin using her state.gov address.
(Credit: public domain)

(<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/2193/2016/05/05/36-more-clinton-emails-are-publicly-released-suggesting-many-more-still-to-come/>) are only a small percentage of all her emails that are going to be released on a monthly basis well into **2017**. It is likely that Clinton's supposed 31,000 "personal" emails contain thousands of work-related emails to and from Abedin alone. Consider that only about 15% of the 30,000 Clinton emails released so far were between her and Abedin. If the rest of her deleted emails follow the same pattern as the Abedin ones, it is highly likely that the majority, and maybe even the vast majority, of Clinton's deleted "personal" emails in fact are work-related.

Why was the sorting effort so flawed?



Clinton in a home video recording on June 9, 2000. (Credit: public domain)

FBI Director Comey has said he trusts that Clinton had made a sincere sorting effort, but the sheer number of work-related emails that keep getting discovered suggests otherwise. Furthermore, logic and other evidence also suggest otherwise. For instance, in home video footage from a private fundraiser in 2000 (<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clinton-emails-timeline-rules-allegedly/story?id=29442707>), Clinton talked about how she had deliberately avoided using email so she wouldn't leave a paper trail: "As much as I've been investigated and all of that, you know, why would I? I don't even want... Why would I ever want to do email? Can you imagine?"

Practical considerations forced her to start using email a few years later. But what if her exclusive use of a private email address on her own private server was not done out of "convenience" (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/4193/2009/03/22/clinton-writes-about-designing-a-system-for-how-her-documents-are-handled-by-the-state-department/>) as she claims, but so she could retain control of them, only turning over emails to FOIA requests and later government investigators that she wanted to?

email exchange between Clinton and Abedin, Abedin suggested that Clinton might want to use a State Department email account due because the department computer system kept flagging emails from her private email account as spam. Clinton replied that she was open to some kind of change, but “I don’t want any risk of the

personal being accessible (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/348/2010/11/01/november-2010-clinton-writes-she-doesnt-want-any-risk-of-the-personal-being-accessible-in-her-emails-contradicting-her-later-claim-that-her-main-concern-is-conven/>).” It is further worth noting that these emails were not handed over with the rest of Clinton’s 30,000 work-related emails, despite clearly being work-related, but were somehow uncovered by the State Department inspector general (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/state-department-inspector-general-report-2016/>)’s office. Those very emails are good examples of the kind of material Clinton may have tried to keep secret by controlling the sorting process.



A video image from MSNBC's coverage of the inspector general's report, on May 25, 2016. (Credit: MSNBC)



The Clinton Foundation logo (Credit: The Clinton Foundation)

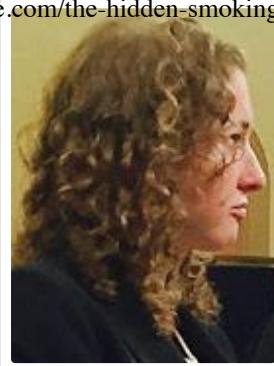
Consider that out of the relatively small number of deleted emails that have been made public due to the Abedin monthly releases, a handful of them have created headlines about possible conflicts of interest between Clinton’s secretary of state job and the Clinton Foundation (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9336/2009/04/25/clintons-top-staffers-provide-help-for-a-top-clinton-foundation-donor-due-to-a-request-from-the-clinton-foundation/>). How many more headlines like that would there be if all 31,000 deleted emails became public before the **November 2016** presidential election? It’s easy to imagine a political motive for Clinton wanting to keep some work-related emails secret.

The deletions begin

This essay will explore this possibility more later. But if it is the case that she wanted to keep those 31,000 “personal” emails out of the public eye, she had obstacles to overcome. In **2014**, PRN had managerial control of both Clinton’s new and old server. Thus, in July 2014 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/979/2014/07/23/clintons-associates-are-given-clintons-emails-so-they-can-begin-sorting-them/>) and again in September 2014 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10221/2014/09/30/clintons-lawyers-are-sent-the-rest->

employee Combettta had to send copies of all the emails to the laptop of Clinton lawyer Cheryl Mills, and another copy to the laptop of Clinton lawyer Heather Samuelson, to be used for the sorting process.

With the sorting done, if Clinton didn't want the public to ever see her deleted emails, you would expect all these copies of those emails to be permanently deleted, and that's exactly what happened. According to a later FBI report, "on or around December 2014 or January 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9850/2014/12/01/copies-of-clintons-emails-are-deleted-from-the-computers-of-two-of-clintons-lawyers/>), Mills and Samuelson requested that [Platte River Networks (PRN) employee Paul Combettta] remove from their laptops all of the emails from the July and September 2014 exports. [Combettta] used a program called BleachBit to delete the email-related files so they could not be recovered."



Heather Samuelson
(Credit: Getty Images)



BleachBit Logo (Credit: BleachBit)

The FBI report explained, "BleachBit is open source software that allows users to 'shred' files, clear Internet history, delete system and temporary files, and wipe free space on a hard drive. Free space is the area of the hard drive that can contain data that has been deleted. BleachBit's 'shred files' function claims to securely erase files by overwriting data to make the data unrecoverable." BleachBit advertises that it can "shred" files so they can never be recovered again.

With the emails of Mills and Samuelson wiped clean, and the old version of the server wiped clean, that left just two known copies of the emails: one on the new server, and one on the back-up Datto SIRIS device connected to the new server. Mills was interviewed by the FBI in **April 2016**. She claimed that in **December 2014**, Clinton decided she no longer needed access to any of her emails older than 60 days (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9853/2014/12/06/clinton-tells-mills-she-doesnt-need-her-personal-emails-resulting-in-mills-telling-those-managing-clintons-server-to-delete-them/>). Note that this came not long after the State Department had formally asked Clinton for all of her work-related emails, on October 28, 2014 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/992/2014/10/28/the-state-department-formally-asks-clinton-to-turn-over-her-emails-from-her-time-as-secretary-of-state/>). Mills told the FBI that she had instructed Combettta to modify the email retention policy on Clinton's clintonemail.com email account to reflect this change. Emails older than 60 days would then be overwritten several times, wiping them just as effectively as BleachBit.

Clinton essentially said the same thing as Mills when she was interviewed by the FBI (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/tag/fbi+cheryl-mills/>). According to the FBI summary of Clinton's interview, she claimed that after her staff sent the 30,000 work-related emails to the State Department on **December 5, 2014**, "she was asked what she wanted to do with her remaining [31,000] personal emails. Clinton instructed her staff (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9853/2014/12/06/clinton-tells-mills-she-doesnt->

[need her personal emails over resulting in-mills-telling-those-managing-clintons-server-to-delete-them/](#)) she no longer needed the emails."

So although the retention policy change sounds like a mere technicality, in fact, Clinton passed the message through Mills that she wanted all her emails from when she was secretary of state to be permanently wiped.

Think about Clinton wanting to delete all her old "personal" emails. As a politician with a wide network of contributors and supporters, the information in them could be highly valuable for her. For instance, if a major donor contacted her, she probably would want to review their past correspondence before responding. She'd preserved these emails for nearly two years, but just when investigators started to demand to see them, she decided she didn't want ANY of them, and all traces of them should be permanently wiped.

But there was a problem with deleting them. Combetta later claimed that he simply forgot to make this change.

More than two months passed, which meant all of Clinton's deleted emails should have been permanently wiped already. Meanwhile, [the House Benghazi Committee](#) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11092/2014/12/02/the-house-benghazi-committee-asks-clinton-for-all-benghazi-related-emails-from-her-personal-email-address/>) and others were making [more requests to see her emails](#) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1021/2014/11/18/the-house-benghazi-committee-makes-an-additional-request-for-emails-to-and-from-clinton-and-ten-of-her-senior-staff-at-the-state-department/>). In **January 2015**, a reporter even [filed a FOIA request in court for all of her emails](#) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1054/2015/01/25/a-lawsuit-filed-this-day-will-result-in-the-release-of-all-of-clintons-work-emails/>).



A Secret Service agent stands guard while two other agents close a gate after a Secret Service vehicle arrived at the home of Clinton in Washington, DC, July 2, 2016. (Credit: Cliff Owen / The Associated Press)

New York Times

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2015



Clinton Used Personal Email At State Dept.
Look of Archiving May Break Federal Rules

By MICHAEL R. WOODRUFF
WASHINGTON — Hillary Clinton's use of a private email account as secretary of state, first reported by The Post last month, has raised new questions about whether her office violated federal regulations for classified communications with foreign governments.

Then, on **March 2, 2015**, [the headline on the front page of the New York Times](#)

<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1080/2015/03/02/a-new-york-times-front-page-article-reveals-to-the-public-for-the-first-time-that-clinton-used-a-private-email-account-on-a-private-server-for-all-her-emails-while-secretary-of-state/>) was a story revealing that while Clinton was secretary of state, she had exclusively used a private email address hosted

on her private server, thus keeping all of her email communications secret. This became THE

big story of the month, and the start of a high-profile controversy that continues until today.

On December 2, 2014, the House Benghazi Committee had asked Clinton for all Benghazi-related emails (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11092/2014/12/02/the-house-benghazi-committee-asks-clinton-for-all-benghazi-related-emails-from-her-personal-email-address/>) from her personal email address. But one day after the New York Times blockbuster story, the committee sent Clinton a letter asking her to preserve ALL her emails (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9869/2015/03/03/the-house-benghazi-committee-requests-clinton-should-preserve-and-then-hand-over-all-her-emails-not-just-those-related-to-benghazi/>) from that address.

Then, a day after that, on March 4, 2015, the committee issued two subpoenas to her (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1135/2015/03/04/the-house-benghazi-committee-privately-issues-two-subpoenas/>). One subpoena ordered her to turn over all emails relating to the Benghazi attack. The committee had already received about 300 such emails from the State Department in February 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1065/2015/02/13/the-state-department-sends-the-house-benghazi-committee-about-300-of-clintons-emails-relating-to-libya/>), but after the Times story, the committee worried that the department might not have some of her relevant emails. (That would later prove to be the case, given the small number of Benghazi emails eventually recovered by the FBI.) The second subpoena ordered her to turn over documents it requested in November 2014 but still had not received from the State Department, relating to communications between Clinton and ten senior department officials.

If Clinton had already deleted her emails to keep them from future investigators, these requests shouldn't have been a problem. On March 9, 2015, Mills sent an email to PRN employees (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9880/2015/03/09/an-email-from-cheryl-mills-warns-a-platte-river-networks-employee-that-clintons-emails-should-be-preserved-but-he-will-delete-them-all-later-in-the-month-anyway/>), including Combettta, to make sure they were aware of the committee's request that all of Clinton's emails be preserved. One might consider this a CYA ("cover your ass") move, since Mills would have believed all copies of Clinton's "personal" emails had been permanently deleted and wiped by this time. The Times story and the requests for copies of Clinton's emails that followed had seemingly come too late.

But that wasn't actually the case, since Combettta had forgotten to make the deletions!



Cheryl Mills (Credit: Twitter)

Combetta deletes everything that is left



Sitting behind Paul Combetta is co-founder of Platte River Brent Allhouse (left) and PRN attorney, Ken Eichner. (Credit: CSpan)

On March 20, 2015, the House Benghazi Committee sent a letter to Clinton's lawyer Kendall (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1233/2015/03/20/the-house-benghazi-committee-formally-requests-that-clinton-turn-over-her-private-email-server/>), asking Clinton to turn her server over to a neutral third party so it could be examined to see if any work-related

emails were still on it. This was reported in the *New York Times* and other media outlets.

Then, on March 27, 2015, Kendall replied to the committee in a letter (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1255/2015/03/27/clinton-is-not-willing-to-hand-over-her-private-server-to-see-if-emails-were-improperly-deleted/>) that also was reported on by the *Times* and others that same day. Kendall wrote, "There is no basis to support the proposed third-party review of the server... To avoid prolonging a discussion that would be academic, I have confirmed with the secretary's IT [information technology] support that no emails... for the time period January 21, 2009 through February 1, 2013 reside on the server or on any back-up systems associated with the server."

When Kendall mentioned Clinton's IT support, that had to have been a reference to PRN.

According to a later Combetta FBI interview, he claimed that on March 25, 2015, there was a conference call between PRN employees (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9874/2015/03/25/a-conference-call-precedes-the-permanent-deletion-of-clintons-personal-emails/>), including himself, and some members of Bill Clinton's staff. (Hillary Clinton's private server hosted the emails of Bill Clinton's staff too, and one unnamed staffer hired PRN back in 2013.) There was another conference call (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9878/2015/03/31/an-unnamed-platte-river-networks-employee-talks-to-two-of-clintons-lawyers-shortly-after-deleting-and-wiping-all-of-clintons-emails-from-her-server/>) between PRN and Clinton staffers on March 31, 2015, with at least Combetta, Mills, and Clinton lawyer David Kendall taking part in that later call.

Based on what Combetta later told the FBI, at some point between these two calls, he had an "Oh shit!" moment and remembered that he'd forgotten to make the requested retention policy change back in December. So, even though he told the FBI that he was aware of the emails from Mills mentioning the Congressional request to preserve all of Clinton's emails, he took action. Instead of simply making the retention policy change, which would have preserved the emails for another two months, he immediately deleted all of Clinton's emails from her server. Then he used BleachBit to permanently wipe them.

Additionally, recall that there was a Datto...
SIRIS back-up device connected to the server and periodically making copies of all the data on the server. There is no mention in the FBI's report that Combettta confessed to doing this, but the FBI found "evidence of these [server] deletions and determined the Datto backups of the server were also manually

deleted during this timeframe (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9876/2015/03/26/an-unnamed-platte-river-networks-employee-allegedly-deletes-all-of-clintons-emails-and-then-wipes-them-to-prevent-their-recovery-despite-apparently-having-no-clear-order-to-do-so/>)." The Datto device sent a records log back to the Datto company whenever any changes were made, and according to a letter from Datto to the FBI that later became public, the deletions on the device were made **around noon on March 31, 2015**, the same date as the second conference call. (Although the server and Datto device were in New Jersey and Combettta was working remotely from Rhode Island, he could make changes remotely, as he or other PRN employees did on other occasions.)

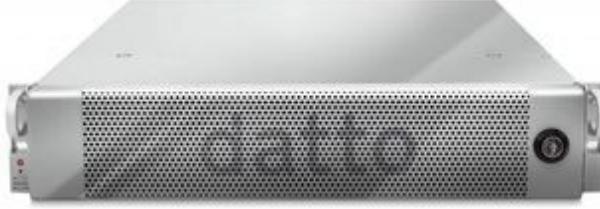
A recent Congressional committee letter mentioned that the other deletions were also made on or around **March 31, 2015**. So it's probable they were all done at the same time by the same person: Combettta.

Combettta's startling initiate is hard to explain. He didn't just change the data retention policy, as Mills had asked him to do, causing them to be permanently deleted 60 days later. He immediately deleted all of Clinton's emails and then wiped them for good measure, and almost certainly deleted them from the Datto back-up device too. It is reasonable to wonder whether, during the conference calls, he was instructed to take these actions.



Steve Linick (Credit: US State Department)

The FBI's Clinton email investigation didn't formally begin until July 10, 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9756/2015/07/10/the-fbis-clinton-investigation-formally-begins/>)—more than two months after Combettta took those actions. However, State Department inspector general Steve Linick began investigating Clinton's email usage in April 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1269/2015/04/01/april-2015-state-department-inspector-general-steve-linick-begins-an-inquiry-into-clintons-emails-at-john-kerrys-request/>), and he could have given her an order to preserve all her documents—we don't know. Furthermore, CNN has reported that the FBI investigation actually began informally in late May 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11482/2015/05/31/the-fbi-reportedly-begins-an-informal-investigation-into-clintons-emails/>), which is less than two months *after* the deletions. So Combettta's actions may have prevented the State Department and/or the FBI from easily recovering all the emails in time.



The Datto SIRIS S2000 was used for back-up services.
(Credit: Datto, Inc.)



David Kendall (Credit:
Above the Law)

However, despite all these clear signs that the emails should be preserved, not only did Combetta confess in an FBI interview that “at the time he made the deletions in **March 2015**, he was aware of the existence of the preservation request and the fact that it meant he should not disturb Clinton’s email data on the [server],” he said that “he did not receive guidance from other PRN personnel, PRN’s legal counsel or others (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9880/2015/03/09/an-email-from-cheryl-mills-warns-a-platte-river-networks-employee-that-clintons-emails-should-be-preserved-but-he-will-delete-them-all-later-in-the-month-anyway/>) regarding the meaning of the preservation request.” Thus, he effectively confessed to obstruction of justice, perhaps in return for legal immunity, though the terms of that immunity have also not been revealed by the FBI.

Investigations and cover-ups

This is perplexing enough already, but it gets stranger still, if we continue to follow the behavior of Combetta and PRN as a whole.



An inside look at the Equinix facility in Secaucus, NJ. (Credit:
Chang W. Lee / New York Times)

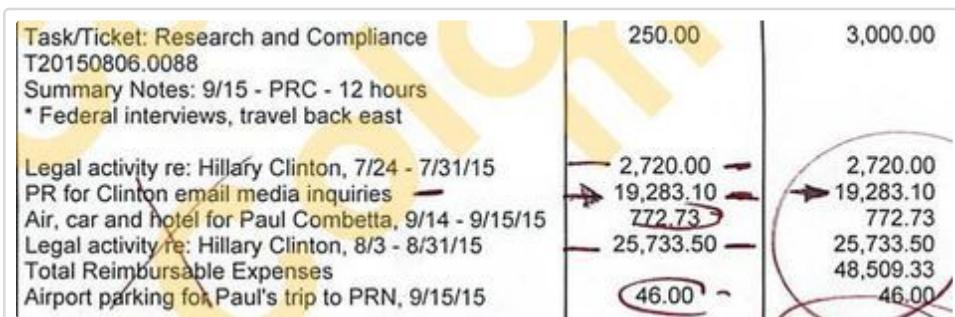
By **August 2015**, the FBI’s Clinton investigation was in full swing, and they began interviewing witnesses and confiscating equipment for analysis. Because the FBI never empanelled a grand jury, it didn’t have subpoena power, so it had to ask Clinton for permission to seize her server. She gave that permission on August 11, 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1450/2015/08/11/clinton-finally-agrees-to-allow-the-justice-department-to-investigate-her-private-email-server-as-well-as-thumb-drives-housing-her-work-emails/>), and the server was picked up from the data center in New Jersey **the next day** (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1460/2015/08/12/the-fbi-picks-up-clintons-private-emails/>).

that there actually were two servers there, an old one and a new one. All the data had been wiped from the old one and moved to the new one, so the new one was the more important one to analyze. But the FBI only picked up the old one.

According to the FBI's final report, "At the time of the FBI's acquisition of the [server], Williams & Connolly [the law firm of Clinton's personal lawyer David Kendall] did not advise the US government of the existence of the additional equipment associated with the [old server], or that Clinton's clintonemail.com emails had been migrated to the successor [server] remaining at [the] Equinix [data center]. The FBI's subsequent investigation identified this additional equipment and revealed the email migration." As a result, the FBI finally picked up the new server (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9966/2015/10/03/the-fbi-picks-up-the-most-recent-clinton-email-server-which-is-still-being-used-by-clinton/>) on October 3, 2015.

It was bad enough that Clinton's lawyer wasn't forthcoming about this, especially since Clinton and her staff had switched to using new email accounts located on a different server with a different domain name (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9971/2014/12/01/clinton-apparently-finally-stops-using-the-clintonemail-com-domain-and-server-for-her-daily-emails/>) in late 2014, so the servers in question weren't urgently needed anymore. But who else could have told the FBI about the data getting transferred to the new server? PRN.

The FBI interviewed PRN's staff in September 2015.



A snippet from the invoice published by Complete Colorado on October 19, 2015. (Credit: Todd Shepherd / Complete Colorado) (Used with express permission from CompleteColorado.com. Do not duplicate or republish.)

(<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10595/2015/09/01/employees-at-the-company-managing-clintons-server-are-interviewed-by-the-fbi/>) This almost certainly included Cometta and Bill Thornton, because they were the only two PRN employees actively managing Clinton's server.

It's particularly important to know if Cometta was interviewed at this time. The FBI's final report clearly stated that he was interviewed twice, in February 2016 and May 2016 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10312/2016/02/18/an-unnamed-platte-river-networks-employee-is-interviewed-twice-by-the-fbi-and-gives-contradictory-answers/>), and repeatedly referred to what was said in his "first interview" and "second interview." However, we luckily know that he was interviewed in **September 2015** as well, because of a PRN invoice billed to Clinton Executive Service Corp. (CESC), a Clinton family company, that was made public **later in 2015**. The invoice made clear that Cometta, who was working remotely from

The Hidden Story of the Clinton Email Scandal: Part 1: The FBI's Coverup of the Clinton Email Deletion (Part 1 of 3)

Rhode Island, flew to Colorado on September 14, 2015, and then “federal interviews” took place on September 15. Combetta’s rental car, hotel, and return airfare costs were itemized as well. As this essay later makes clear, PRN was refusing to cooperate with anyone else in the US government but the FBI by this time, so “federal interviews” can only mean the FBI.

The fact that the FBI falsely claimed Combetta was only interviewed twice grows in importance given a recent New York Times report that the Justice Department gave Combetta some form of legal immunity (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10382/2016/09/08/the-fbi-gave-an-immunity-deal-to-the-computer-employee-who-deleted-and-wiped-clintons-emails/>). One other person in the investigation, Bryan Pagliano, was given immunity as well. But his immunity deal was leaked to the media and had been widely reported on since March 2016 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1999/2016/03/02/it-is-reported-clintons-former-computer-technician-has-made-an-immunity-deal/>).

By contrast, Combetta’s immunity wasn’t even mentioned in the FBI’s final report, and members of Congress were upset to first read about it in the *Times*, because they had never been told about it either.



Bryan Pagliano (Credit: public domain)

The mystery of this situation deepens when one looks at the FBI report regarding what Combetta said in his **February 2016** and **May 2016** interviews. In February 2016, he claimed that he remembered in late March 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10312/2016/02/18/an-unnamed-platte-river-networks-employee-is-interviewed-twice-by-the-fbi-and-gives-contradictory-answers/>) that he forgot to make the change to the email retention policy on Clinton’s server, but that was it. He claimed he never did make any deletions. He also claimed that he was unaware of the **March 9, 2015** email from Mills warning of the Congressional request to preserve all of Clinton’s emails.



Paul Combetta (Credit: public domain)

Then, in **May 2016**, he completely changed his story. He said that in fact he did make the deletions in **late March 2015** after all, plus he’d wiped her emails with BleachBit, as described earlier. He also confessed to being aware of the Mills email with the preservation request.

It still hasn’t been reported when Combetta’s immunity deal was made. However, it seems probable that this took place between his **February 2016** and **May 2016** interviews, causing the drastic change in his account. Yet, it looks that he still hasn’t been fully honest or forthcoming. Note that he didn’t confess to the deletion of data on the Datto back-up device, even though it took place at the same time as the other deletions. The FBI learned that on their own by analyzing the device.

Attorney-client privilege?!

More crucially, we know that Combetta has not revealed what took place in the second conference call between PRN and Clinton employees. Here is all the FBI's final report has to say about that: "Investigation identified a PRN work ticket, which referenced a conference call among PRN, Kendall, and Mills on March 31, 2015. PRN's attorney advised [Combettta] not to comment on the conversation with Kendall, based upon the assertion of the attorney-client privilege (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9878/2015/03/31/an-unnamed-platte-river-networks-employee-talks-to-two-of-clintons-lawyers-shortly-after-deleting-and-wiping-all-of-clintons-emails-from-her-server/>)."

This is extremely bizarre. What "attorney-client privilege"?!

That would only apply for communications between Combetta and his lawyer or lawyers. It's clear that Combetta's lawyer isn't Mills or Kendall. The *New York Times* article about the immunity deal made a passing reference to his lawyer, and, when Combetta showed up for a Congressional hearing on **September 12**, he was accompanied by a lawyer who photographs from the hearing make clear is Ken Eichner, who has been the legal counsel for PRN as a whole regarding Clinton's server.

Even if Combetta's lawyer Eichner was participating in the call, there is no way that should protect Combetta from having to tell what he said to Clinton employees like Mills or Kendall. If that's how the law works, criminals could simply always travel with a lawyer and then claim anything they do or say with the lawyer present is inadmissible as evidence due to attorney-client privilege. It's absurd.

For the FBI to give Combetta an immunity deal and then still not learn if he had been told to delete the emails by anyone working for Clinton due to a completely legally indefensible "attorney-client privilege" excuse is beyond belief. It would make sense, however, if the FBI was actually trying to protect Clinton from prosecution instead of trying to find evidence to prosecute her.



Sitting behind Paul Combetta at the House Oversight Committee hearing on September 13, 2016, is PRN attorney Ken Eichner. (Credit: CSpan)

Combettta's Reddit posts

Furthermore, how much can Combetta be trusted, even in an FBI interview? It has recently come to light that he made Reddit posts under the username "stonetear." There can be no doubt this was Combetta, because the details match perfectly, including him signing a post "Paul," having another social media account for a Paul Combetta with the username "stonetear," having a combetta.com website mentioning his "stonetear" alias, and even

posting a photo of stonetear that matches other known photos of Combetta.



A photo comparison of Combetta at the House Oversight Committee hearing (left) and a captured shot of Combetta as stonetear (right). (Credit: CSpan and public domain)

In one Reddit post (<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-09-19/paul-combetta-computer-specialist-who-deleted-hillary-clinton-emails-may-have-asked-reddit-for-tips>), he asked other server managers: “I may be facing a very interesting situation where I need to strip out a VIP’s (VERY VIP) email address from a bunch of archived email that I have both in a live Exchange mailbox, as well as a .pst file. Basically, they don’t want the VIP’s email address exposed to anyone,

and want to be able to either strip out or replace the email address in the to/from fields in all of the emails we want to send out. ... Does anyone have experience with something like this, and/or suggestions on how this might be accomplished?”

Question Remove or replace to/from address on archived emails? (self.exchange&server)
submitted 2 years ago by **stonetear**

Hello all- I may be facing a very interesting situation where I need to strip out a VIP's (VERY VIP) email address from a bunch of archived email that I have both in a live Exchange mailbox, as well as a PST file. Basically, they don't want the VIP's email address exposed to anyone, and want to be able to either strip out or replace the email address in the to/from fields in all of the emails we want to send out.

I am not sure if something like this is possible with PowerShell, or exporting all of the emails to MSG and doing find/replaces with a batch processing program of some sort.

Does anyone have experience with something like this, and/or suggestions on how this might be accomplished?

This July 24, 2014 Reddit post contains a request for advice about “stripping out” the email address of a “VERY VIP” email account. (Credit: Reddit)

The date of the post—**July 24, 2014**—is very significant, because that was just one day after Combetta sent CESC (the Clinton family company) DVDs containing some of Clinton's emails (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/979/2014/07/23/clintons-associates-are-given-clintons-emails-so-they-can-begin-sorting-them/>), so Clinton's lawyers could start the sorting process. Also on **July 23, 2014**, an unnamed PRN employee sent Samuelson and Mills the same emails electronically directly to their laptops.

Popular software made by companies like Microsoft have tried to make it impossible for people to change email records, so people facing legal trouble can't tamper with emails after they've been sent. Thus, when Combetta posed his problem at Reddit, other Reddit users told him that what he wanted to do “could result in major legal issues.” But that didn't deter him, and he kept asking for various ways to get it accomplished anyway.

It isn't clear why Clinton would have wanted her email address removed from all her emails, since her exact address had already been exposed in the media back in **March 2013** by the hacker known as Guccifer. One Gawker reporter even used it to email Clinton on **March 20,**

because it's clear in hindsight that an honest answer would have been "no.") But the fact that Combetta was willing to at least try to do this raises questions, especially his seeming willingness to do something illegal for his "VIP" customer Hillary Clinton.

Combetta made another important Reddit post a few months later:

"Hello- I have a client who

wants to push out a 60 day email retention policy for certain users. However, they also want these users to have a 'Save Folder' in their Exchange folder list where the users can drop items that they want to hang onto longer than the 60 day window. All email in any other folder in the mailbox should purge anything older than 60 days (should not apply to calendar or contact items of course). How would I go about this? Some combination of retention and managed folder policy?"

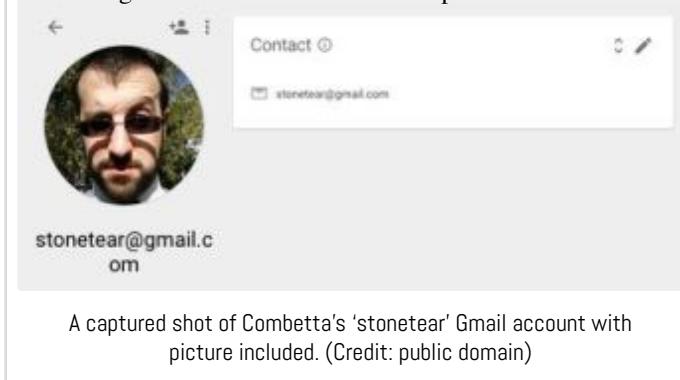
Question Auto-delete/retention policy and 'save' folder (self.exchange) (self.exchange)

submitted 1 year ago by stonetear

Hello- I have a client who wants to push out a 60 day email retention policy for certain users. However, they also want these users to have a 'Save Folder' in their Exchange folder list where the users can drop items that they want to hang onto longer than the 60 day window. All email in any other folder in the mailbox should purge anything older than 60 days (should not apply to calendar or contact items of course). How would I go about this? Some combination of retention and managed folder policy?

Another question was captured of 'stonetear' aka Combetta asking Reddit users for technical help. (Credit: Reddit)

Again, the timing is telling, because this post was made on **December 10, 2014**. Recall that **December 2014 (or January 2015)** was when he deleted and then wiped Clinton's emails (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9853/2014/12/06/clinton-tells-mills-she-doesnt-need-her-personal-emails-resulting-in-mills-telling-those-managing-clintons-server-to-delete-them/>) from the laptops of Mills and Samuelson. December also was the month that Mills asked him to change the retention policy on Clinton's server to 60 days (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9853/2014/12/06/clinton-tells-mills-she-doesnt-need-her-personal-emails-resulting-in-mills-telling-those-managing-clintons-server-to-delete-them/>), which is precisely the issue he was asking about in his Reddit post.



Clinton told him to make it look like all the “personal” emails were permanently deleted due to the 60 day policy change, while actually keeping copies of emails they still wanted.

Looking at Combetta's two Reddit posts detailed above, there are only two possibilities. One is that Combetta failed to disclose crucial information to the FBI,

despite his immunity deal. The second is that he did, but the FBI didn't mention it in its final report. Either way, it's already clear that the FBI has failed to present the full story of Combetta's actions to the public. And how much of what Combetta has said can be trusted, even in his most recent and supposedly most forthcoming FBI interview?

Remarkably, there is a hint that Combetta was being dishonest even before his **late March 2015** deletions. On **March 3, 2015**, one day after the front-page *New York Times* story revealing Clinton's use of a private server, PRN's vice president of sales David DeCamillis sent an email to some or all of the other PRN employees. The email has only been paraphrased in news reports so far, but he was already wondering what Clinton emails the company might be asked to turn over (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11559/2015/03/03/the-head-of-the-company-managing-clintons-private-server-makes-a-curious-political-comment-he-also-wonders-what-clinton-emails-might-have-to-turn-over/>).



David DeCamillis
(Credit: Twitter)

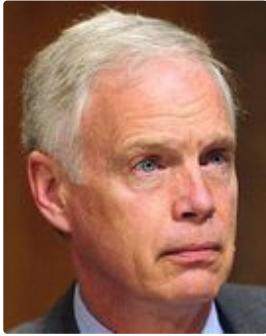
Combetta replied to the email (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11555/2015/03/03/the-employee-who-will-later-delete-all-of-clintons-emails-is-asked-about-what-clinton-emails-might-be-turned-over/>), “I've done quite a bit already in the last few months related to this. Her [Clinton's] team had me do a bunch of exports and email filters and cleanup to provide a .pst [personal storage file] of all of HRC's [Hillary Rodham Clinton's] emails to/from any .gov addresses. ... I billed probably close to 10 hours in on-call tickets with CESC related to it :).”

First off, it's interesting that he said he did “a bunch” of “email filters and cleanup,” because what has been reported by the FBI is that he only made a copy of all of Clinton's email and sent them off to be sorted in **late July 2014**. That fits with his **July 2014** Reddit post where he was trying to modify somebody's email address.

But also, assuming that there aren't important parts to his email that haven't been mentioned by the media, consider what he didn't say. The topic was possibly turning over Clinton's emails, and yet by this time Combetta had already deleted and wiped all of Clinton's emails from the laptops of two Clinton lawyers and been asked to change the email retention policy on Clinton's server so that all her emails would be permanently deleted there too, and yet he

We can only speculate based on the limited amount of information made public so far. But it seems as if Combetta was covering up for Clinton and/or the people working for her even BEFORE he made his **late March 2015** deletions!

Who knows about the deletions, and how?



Senator Ron Johnson
(Credit: John Shinkle /
Politico)

For now, let us turn back to events in the **fall of 2015**. In **mid-August 2015**, Senator Ron Johnson (R) asked for and got a staff-level briefing from PRN (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10816/2015/08/08/the-company-that-manages-clintons-server-gives-a-presentation-to-congressional-investigators-but-fails-to-mention-the-deletion-and-wiping-of-clintons-emails/>) about the management of Clinton's server, as part of Republican Congressional oversight of the FBI's investigation. It seems very likely that Combetta was a part of that briefing, or at least his knowledge heavily informed the briefing, because again only two PRN employees actively managed her server, and he was one of them.

Regardless of whether he was there or not, it is clear that PRN was not honest in the briefing. Almost nothing is publicly known about the briefing except that it took place. However, from questions Johnson asked PRN in later letters, one can see that he knew nothing about the **March 2015** deletions by Combetta. In fact, just like the FBI, there is no indication he knew anything about the transfer of the data from the old server to the new in that time period, which would be a basic fact in any such briefing.

The dishonesty or ignorance of PRN in this time period can be clearly seen due to a **September 12, 2015** *Washington Post* article. In it, PRN spokesperson Andy Boian said, "Platte River has no knowledge of the server being wiped (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1647/2015/09/12/the-company-that-recently-managed-clintons-email-server-say-they-have-no-knowledge-of-the-server-being-wiped/>).". He added, "All the information we have is that the server wasn't wiped." We now know that not only was this untrue, but a PRN employee did the wiping!



Andy Boian (Credit:
public domain)

This leads to two possibilities. One is that Combetta lied to his PRN bosses, so in **September 2015** nobody else in PRN knew about the deletions he'd made. The other is that additional people at PRN knew, but they joined in a cover-up.

The Hidden Smokescreen: Clinton's server was deleted. The deleted smoking-gun-the...
one would think the company leadership would have quickly learned about the deletion if they did any examination of their managerial actions to prepare for investigative briefings and interviews.

But either way, PRN as a whole began acting as if there was something to hide. Although the company agreed to the briefing of Congressional staffers in **mid-August 2015**, when Senator Johnson wanted to follow this up with interviews of individual PRN employees in early September, PRN said no (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10587/2015/09/01/the-company-that-manages-clintons-server-refuses-to-cooperate-with-congressional-investigators/>). When Congressional committees began asking PRN for documents, they also said no, and kept saying no. Recently, as we shall see later, they've even defied a Congressional subpoena for documents.



Austin McChord, founder and CEO of Datto, Inc. (Credit: Erik Traufmann / Hearst Connecticut Media)

At the same time Congressional committees began asking PRN for documents and interviews, they made those requests to Datto as well.

Datto expressed a willingness to cooperate. But because Datto had been subcontracted by PRN to help manage Clinton's server, they needed PRN's permission to share any information relating to that account. When PRN was first asked in **early October 2015**, they gave permission. But about a week later,

they changed their mind (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11363/2015/10/05/the-company-managing-clintons-private-server-gives-permission-for-another-company-to-cooperate-with-congressional-investigators-and-then-takes-it-away/>), forcing Datto to stay quiet.

To make matters worse, in **early November 2015**, PRN spokesperson Andy Boian gave a completely bogus public excuse about this, saying that PRN and Datto had mutually agreed it was more convenient for investigators to deal with just one company. Datto immediately complained in a letter sent to PRN and Senator Johnson (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11363/2015/10/05/the-company-managing-clintons-private-server-gives-permission-for-another-company-to-cooperate-with-congressional-investigators-and-then-takes-it-away/>) that no such discussion or agreement between PRN and Datto had ever taken place.

What is PRN hiding?

The Hidden Subpoena: Clinton's Cloud Backups
The Clinton family company CESG made explicit that they didn't want any of the data to be stored remotely (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11367/2013/05/31/a-device-is-bought-to-make-back-ups-of-clintons-private-server-but-a-clinton-company-makes-clear-it-doesnt-want-any-back-up-data-stored-remotely/>). But due to some snafu or miscommunication, it turns out that in addition to local back-ups being stored on the Datto device connected to the server, Datto had been making periodic copies of the server data the whole time in the "cloud!" That means back-up copies of the data were being transferred over the Internet and stored remotely, probably on other servers controlled by Datto.

PRN only discovered this in early August 2015 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11369/2015/08/01/the-company-managing-clintons-private-server-learns-that-another-company-has-been-making-back-up-copies-of-all-the-server-data-in-the-internet-cloud-since-2013/>), around the time the roles of PRN and Datto had with the server began to be made public. PRN contacted Datto, told them to stop doing this, put all the data on a thumb drive, send it to them, and then permanently wipe their remote copies of the server data.



Co-founders of PRN are Brent Allshouse (left) and Treve Suazo (right) (Credit: PRN)

It is unclear what happened after that. The FBI's final report mentions a Datto back-up made on June 29, 2013 (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9800/2013/06/29/some-of-clintons-emails-are-later-recovered-due-to-a-back-up-of-computer-files-made-on-this-date/>), just after all the data had been moved from the old server to the new sever with the back-up, had been useful to investigators and allowed them to find some Clinton emails dating all the way back to the first two months of her secretary of state tenure. However, it isn't clear if this is due to the local Datto SIRIS device or the accidental Datto cloud back-up. Congressional committee letters show that they don't know either and have been trying to find out.

Adding to the mystery, one would think that if Datto was making periodic back-ups either or both ways, the FBI would have been able to recover all of Clinton's over 31,000 deleted emails and not just 17,000 of them. Consider that when PRN employees sent Clinton's lawyers all of Clinton's emails to be sorted in July and September 2014, they simply copied what was on the server at the time, which presumably was the same amount of emails from years earlier than had been there in June 2013, and thus backed up by Datto many times.

It's likely there are more twists to the cloud back-up story that have yet to be revealed.

What did Clinton and her aides know about the deletions?

Meanwhile, let's consider what Clinton and her aides may have known and when they knew it.

When Mills was interviewed by the FBI in April 2016 (<http://www.thompsontimeline.com/10423/2016/04/09/mills-tells-the-fbi-she-never-knew-clintons-emails-got-deleted/>), according to the FBI, "Mills stated she was unaware that [Combetta] had conducted these deletions and modifications in **March 2015**." Then, when Clinton was interviewed by the FBI in July 2016 (<http://www.thompsontimeline.com/10522/2016/07/02/clinton-tells-the-fbi-she-never-knew-her-emails-got-deleted/>), "Clinton stated she was...unaware of the March 2015 email deletions by PRN."

This is pretty hard to believe. Mills was and still is one of Clinton's lawyers, and even attended Clinton's FBI interview. So why wouldn't she have mentioned the deletions to Clinton between **April and July 2016**, after she learned about them from the FBI's questions to her? One would think Clinton would have been extremely curious to know anything about the FBI's possible recovery of her deleted emails.

But more importantly, consider what was mentioned in an *NBC News report on August 19, 2015*. Clinton's campaign acknowledged "that there was an attempt to wipe [Clinton's] server



(<http://www.thompsontimeline.com/1531/2015/08/19/someone-tried-to-wipe-clintons-email-server-but-the-fbi-might-recover-the-data-anyway/>) before it was turned over last week to the FBI. But two sources with direct knowledge of the investigation told *NBC News*...that the [FBI] may be able to recover at least some data."

Is it plausible that people within Clinton's campaign knew this, and yet neither Mills nor Clinton did? How could that be? Note that just one day before the *NBC News* report, Clinton had been directly asked if her server had been wiped. She dodged the question by making the joke (<http://www.thompsontimeline.com/1527/2015/08/18/clinton-claims-not-to-know-what-wiping-computer-data-is/>), "What—like with a cloth, or something?" Then she said she didn't "know how it works digitally at all." Despite the controversy at the time about the cloth joke, her spokesperson claimed one month later, "I don't know what 'wiped' means."

The Hidden Smoking Gun: Clinton's conscious effort not to have her admitted knowing anything due to the on-going FBI investigation.

But more crucially, how could anyone at all working for Clinton know about the deletions as far back as **August 2015**? Recall that this was within days of PRN giving a briefing to Congressional staffers and not telling them, and several weeks prior to a PRN public comment that there was no evidence the server had been wiped.

Moreover, we have no evidence that the FBI knew about the deletions yet. Datto conducted an analysis of its device that had been attached to Clinton's new server, and in an **October 23, 2015** email, told the FBI for the first time that deletions had taken place (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11356/2015/10/23/a-computer-company-tells-the-fbi-that-its-back-up-copy-of-clintons-private-server-data-was-deleted-in-late-march-2015/>) on that device on **March 31, 2015**. Keep in mind that even in his **February 2016** FBI interview, Combettta claimed that no deletions had taken place in that time frame. Does it make sense that he would have said that if he had reason to believe that PRN had been talking to Clinton's staff about it in the months before? (None of the interviews in the FBI's investigations were done under oath, but lying to the FBI is a felony with a maximum five-year prison sentence.)

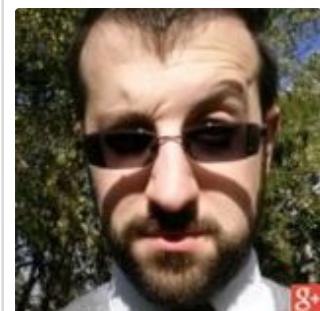
Manual and Automatic removal of “recovery points”

Datto technical experts have reviewed administrative files. Based on that review Datto has identified 182 “recovery points” which were subject to delete requests through the “recovery point page” of the Partner Portal website available to the Platte River Network-located Local Device. These manual requests were requested from the Local Device’s web interface for the [REDACTED] agent, and all occurred on March 31, 2015 between 11:27:14 a.m. and 12:41:12 am. The 182 recovery points had a date range of January 28, 2015 to March 24, 2015. In

A sample of the email sent to the FBI by Datto attorney, Steven Cash on October 23, 2015. (Credit: House Science Committee)

So, again, how could Clinton's campaign know about the wiping in **August 2015**? The logical answer is that it had been discussed in the conference call on **March 31, 2015**, that took place within hours of the deletions.

Perhaps Mills, Kendall, or someone else working for Clinton told Combettta to make the deletions, possibly during the first conference call on **March 25, 2015**. If that is the case, there should be obstruction of justice charges brought against anyone involved. Or maybe Combettta did that on his own to cover his earlier mistake and then mentioned what he'd done in the second conference call. If either scenario is true, Mills should be charged with lying to the FBI for claiming in her FBI interview that she knew nothing about any of this. Clinton might be charged for the same if it could be proved what she knew and when.



Paul Combettta (Credit: public domain)

"Shady shit" and "Hillary's cover-up operation"

But there's still more to this strange story. Somehow by **October 5, 2015**, Senator Johnson got hold of a curious email exchange between Combetta and Thornton (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11363/2015/10/05/the-company-managing-clintons-private-server-gives-permission-for-another-company-to-cooperate-with-congressional-investigators-and-then-takes-it-away/>), and he mentioned it in a letter to PRN that got leaked to the public the next day. (Recall that Bill Thornton is the other PRN employee who actively managed Clinton's server.)

Just as the email retention policy on the Clinton server was changed on the orders of people working for Clinton, so was the retention policy on the Datto device connected to the server, in the same time period.

In an **August 18, 2015** email, Combetta expressed concern that CESC, the Clinton family company, had directed PRN to reduce the length of time backups, and PRN wanted proof of this so they wouldn't be blamed. But he said in the email, "this was all phone comms [communications]."



Paul Combetta (left) Bill Thornton (right) (Credit: The Associated Press)

The next day, there was another email, this one written by Thornton to Combetta and possibly others in PRN (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/1498/2015/08/19/mid-august-2015-an-employee-at-the-company-recently-managing-clintons-private-email-server-expresses-concerns-of-a-cover-up/>). The email has the subject heading "CESC Datto." Thornton wrote: "Any chance you found an old email with their directive to cut the backup back in Oct-Feb. I know they had you cut it

once in Oct-Nov, then again to 30 days in Feb-ish." (Presumably this refers to **October 2014** through **February 2015**.)

Thornton continued: "If we had that email, then we're golden. [...] Wondering how we can sneak an email in now after the fact asking them when they told us to cut the backups and have them confirm it for our records. Starting to think this whole thing really is covering up some shady shit. I just think if we have it in writing that they [CESC] told us to cut the backups, and we can go public with our statement saying we have had backups since day one, then we were told to trim to 30 days, it would make us look a WHOLE LOT better."

Combetta replied: "I'll look again, but I'm almost positive we don't have anything about the 60 day cut. [...] It's up to lawyer crap now, so just sit back and enjoy the silly headlines."

As an aside, it's curious that Combetta made some unsolicited additional comments in that same email that was supportive of Clinton's position in the email controversy: "It wasn't the

The Hidden Story of the Clinton Email Cover-up
If we take this email exchange at face value, then it appears that Clinton employees requested an email retention policy change that would result in more deletion of data on the Datto back-up device in the **October to November 2014 time range. Keep in mind that the State Department formally asked Clinton for all of her work-related emails (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/992/2014/10/28/the-state-department-formally-asks-clinton-to-turn-over-her-emails-from-her-time-as-secretary-of-state/>), on **October 28, 2014**, after informally asking starting in **July 2014**. Then, around **February 2015**, Clinton employees asked for another change that would have resulted in more deletions. Plus, they did this on the phone, leaving no paper trail. Is it any wonder that Thornton wrote, “Starting to think this whole thing really is covering up some shady shit?”**

Details are lacking, but roughly around this time period, one unnamed PRN employee made a joke that they were “Hillary’s cover-up operation (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11553/2015/08/01/an-employee-of-the-company-managing-clintons-server-makes-an-apparent-joke-about-being-part-of-hillarys-cover-up-operation/>).” That may have been much more accurate than they realized.

The FBI speaks up, only raising more questions

News about PRN went quiet for the **first half of 2016**. Congressional committees kept asking PRN and Datto for more information (including another request for interviews in **January 2016**), and PRN kept saying no as well as not giving Datto permission to respond.



James Comey (Credit: Fox News)

Then, on **July 5, 2016**, FBI Director James Comey gave a surprise public speech in which he announced he wouldn’t recommend any criminal charges against Clinton (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/6720/2016/07/05/fbi-director-comey-announces-he-will-not-recommend-clintons-indictment-on-any-charge-but-he-calls-her-extremely-careless-in-handling-highly-classified-information/>) or anyone else in the investigation. In the course of his speech, he said it was “likely” that some emails may have disappeared forever because Clinton’s lawyers “deleted all emails they did not return to State, and the lawyers cleaned their devices in such a way as to preclude complete forensic

recovery.” But he said that after interviews and technical examination, “we believe our investigation has been sufficient to give us reasonable confidence there was no intentional misconduct in connection with that sorting effort.”

Two days later, on **July 7, 2016**, Comey had to explain his decision in front of a Congressional committee. During that hearing, he was asked by Representative Trey Gowdy (R), “Secretary Clinton said neither she nor anyone else deleted work-related emails from her personal account. Was that true?”

Comey replied “That’s a Chapter I Get to Answer. (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/7708/2016/07/07/fbi-director-comey-says-it-is-unclear-if-any-of-clintons-emails-were-deleted-by-clinton-or-anyone-working-with-her/>) We found traces of work-related emails in—on devices or in slack space. Whether they were deleted or whether when the server was changed out, something happened to them. There’s no doubt that the work-related emails were removed electronically from the email system.”



Trey Gowdy (Credit: Brendan Smialowski / Getty Images)

Consider that response. By the time Comey made those comments, the FBI's final report had already been finished, the report that detailed Combetta's confession of deliberately deleting and then wiping all of Clinton's emails from her server. Comey was explicitly asked if "anyone" had made such deletions, and yet he said he wasn't sure. Comey should be investigated for lying to Congress! Had he revealed even the rough outlines of Combetta's **late March 2015** deletions in his **July 5, 2016** public speech or his Congressional testimony **two days later**, it would have significantly changed the public perception of the results of the FBI investigation. That also would have allowed Congressional committees to start focusing on this **two months earlier** than they did, enabling them to uncover more in the limited time before the **November** presidential election.



The SECNAP Logo (Credit: SECNAP)

Despite the fact that the Combetta deletions were still unknown, Congressional committees began putting increasing pressure on PRN anyway. On July 12, 2016, two committees jointly wrote a letter to PRN (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10806/2016/07/12/congressional-republicans-threatens-subpoenas-if-the-company-that-managed-clintons-server-fails-to-agree-to-employee-interviews/>), threatening subpoenas if they still refused to cooperate. The letter listed seven PRN employees they wanted to interview, including Combetta and Thornton. Similar letters went out to Datto and SECNAP. (SECNAP was subcontracted by PRN to carry out threat monitoring of the network connected to Clinton's server.)

On **August 22, 2016**, after all three companies still refused to cooperate, Representative Lamar Smith (R), chair of the Committee on Science, Space and Technology, issued subpoenas for PRN, Datto, and SECNAP (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/9626/2016/08/22/a-congressperson-issues-subpoenas-to-three-companies-that-helped-manage-clintons-private-email-server/>).

On **September 2, 2016**, the FBI's final report of their Clinton email investigation (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11260/2016/09/02/the-fbis-clinton-email-investigation-final-report-and-its-summary-of-her-fbi-interview-are-released/>) was released (along with a summary of Clinton's FBI interview). This report revealed the **late March 2015** deletions for the first time. Combetta's name was redacted, but his role, as well as his immunity deal, was revealed in the *New York Times* article published a few days later.

Congressional investigators fight back

Since the report has been released, Congressional Republicans have stepped up their efforts to get answers about the Combetta mystery, using the powers of the committees they control. On **September 6, 2016**, Representative Jason Chaffetz (R), chair of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, wrote a letter to Channing Phillips (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11099/2016/09/06/representative-chaffetz-asks-a-federal-prosecutor-to-determine-if-clinton-and-or-members-of-her-staff-played-a-role-in-deleting-her-emails-from-her-private-server/>), the US attorney for the District of Columbia. He asked the Justice Department to “investigate and determine whether Secretary Clinton or her employees and contractors violated statutes that prohibit destruction of records, obstruction of congressional inquiries, and concealment or cover up of evidence material to a congressional investigation.” Clearly, this relates to the Combetta deletions.



Representative Jason Chaffetz. (Credit: Cliff Owen / The Associated Press)

On the **same day**, Chaffetz sent a letter to PRN warning that Combetta could face federal charges (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11104/2016/09/06/representative-chaffetz-warns-the-person-who-managed-clintons-server-could-face-charges-and-he-also-is-puzzled-by-an-assertion-of-attorney-client-privilege/>) for deleting and wiping Clinton’s emails in **late March 2015**, due to the Congressional request to preserve them earlier in the month that he admitted he was aware of. Chaffetz also wants an explanation from PRN how Combetta could refuse to talk to the FBI about the conference calls if the only lawyers involved in the call were Clinton’s.

On September 9,

Chaffetz served the FBI a subpoena (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11108/2016/09/09/a-congressperson-serves-the-fbi-a-subpoena-for-all-the-unredacted-interviews-from-the-fbis-clinton-investigation/>) for all the unredacted interviews from the FBI’s Clinton investigation, especially those of Combetta and the other PRN employees. This came after an FBI official testifying at a hearing remarkably suggested that



Channing Phillips
(Credit: public domain)



Chaffetz serves the FBI a subpoena during a House Oversight and Government Affairs Committee hearing on September 9, 2016.
(Credit: ABC News)

On September 8, 2016, Congressional committees served the subpoenas (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/10382/2016/09/08/the-fbi-gave-an-immunity-deal-to-the-computer-employee-who-deleted-and-wiped-clintons-emails/>) they'd threatened in August. PRN, Datto, and SECNAP were given until the end of **September 12** to finally turn over the documents the committees had been requesting for year. Datto complied and turned over the documents in time. However, PRN and SECNAP did not.

The next day, **September 13**, Representative Lamar Smith (R) said (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11010/2016/09/13/a-congressperson-alleges-that-clinton-is-responsible-for-a-computer-company-not-complying-with-a-congressional-subpoena-related-to-clintons-private-server/>), "just this morning...SECNAP's [legal] counsel confirmed to my staff that the Clinton's private LLC [Clinton Executive Service Corp.] is actively engaged in directing their obstructionist responses to Congressional subpoenas."

PRN employees Combetta and Thornton were also given subpoenas on **September 8**, ordering them to testify at a Congressional hearing on **September 13, 2016**. Both of them showed up with their lawyers, but both of them pled the Fifth (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11012/2016/09/13/two-former-managers-of-clintons-private-server-plead-the-fifth-before-a-congressional-hearing-one-other-fails-to-appear-at-all/>), leaving many questions unanswered.



Representative Lamar Smith
(Credit: public domain)

An FBI cover-up?

In a Senate speech on **September 12, 2016**, Senator Charles Grassley (R) accused the FBI of manipulating which information about the Clinton email investigation becomes public (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/11326/2016/09/12/senator-grassley-accuses-the-fbi-of-manipulating-which-information-about-the-clinton-email-investigation-becomes-public-in-order-to-hide-certain-events/>). He said that although the FBI has taken the unusual step of releasing the FBI's final report, "its summary is misleading or inaccurate in some key details and leaves out other important facts altogether." He pointed in particular to Combetta's deletions, saying: "[T]here is key information related to that issue that is still being kept secret, even though it is unclassified. If I honor the FBI's 'instruction' not to disclose the unclassified information it provided to Congress, I cannot explain why."

He also said there are dozens of completely unclassified witness reports, but even some of his Congressional staffers can't see them "because the FBI improperly bundled [them] with a small amount of classified information, and told the Senate to treat it all as if it were classified." The normal procedure is for documents to have the classified portions marked.



Senator Charles Grassley takes to the Senate floor on September 12, 2016. (Credit: CSpan (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-wW6NoCP6w>))

separate the unclassified information.” As a result, Grassley claims: “Inaccuracies are spreading because of the FBI’s selective release. For example, the FBI’s recently released summary memo may be contradicted by other unclassified interview summaries that are being kept locked away from the public.”

He said he has been fighting the FBI on this, but without success so far, as the FBI isn’t even replying to his letters.

Thus, it seems that Comey failing

to mention anything about the Combetta deletions in the **July 7, 2016** Congressional hearing, even when directly asked about it, was no accident. Having the FBI report claim that Combetta was only interviewed twice when there is clear evidence of three interviews also fits a pattern of concealment related to the deletions.



James Comey testifies to the House Benghazi Committee on July 7, 2016. (Credit: Scott Applewhite / The Associated Press)

Regarding the FBI’s failure to inform Congressional oversight committees of Combetta’s immunity deal, Representative Trey Gowdy (R) recently commented, “If there is a reason to withhold the immunity agreement from Congress—and by extension, the people we represent—I cannot think of what it would be.”

Gowdy, who is a former federal prosecutor, also said on September 9 that there are two types of immunity Combetta could have received (<http://www.thompsonTimeline.com/10544/2016/09/09/representative-gowdy-says-the-fbi-gave-immunity-to-the-very-person-you-would-most-want-to-prosecute/>): use and transactional. “If the FBI and the Department of Justice gave this witness transactional immunity, it is tantamount to giving the triggerman immunity in a robbery case.” He added that he is “stunned” because “It looks like they gave immunity to the very person you would most want to prosecute.”

This is as much as we know so far, but surely the story won’t stop there. PRN has been served a new subpoena. It is likely the requested documents will be seized from them soon if they continue to resist.

Taking the fall and running out the clock

But why does PRN resist so much? Computer companies often resist sharing information with the government so their reputation with their clients won't be harmed. But defying a subpoena when there clearly are legitimate questions to be answered goes way beyond what companies normally do and threatens PRN's reputation in a different way. Could it be that PRN—an inexplicable choice to manage Clinton's server—was chosen precisely because whatever Clinton aide hired them had reason to believe they would be loyal if a problem like this arose?



David DeCamillis
(Credit: public domain)

There is some anecdotal evidence to support this. It has been reported that PRN has ties to prominent Democrats (<http://www.thompsontimeline.com/1518/2015/08/18/clintons-private-server-has-recently-been-managed-by-a-surprisingly-small-company-with-no-special-security-features/>). For instance, the company's vice president of sales David DeCamillis is said to be a prominent supporter of Democratic politicians, and once offered to let Senator Joe Biden (D) stay in his house in 2008, not long before Biden became Obama's vice president. The company also has done work for John Hickenlooper, the Democratic governor of Colorado. And recall the email in which Combetta brought up points to defend Clinton in her email controversy, even though the email exchange was on a different topic.

The behavior of the FBI is even stranger. Comey was a registered Republican most of his life, and it is well known that most FBI agents are politically conservative. Be that as it may, if Comey made a decision beforehand based on some political calculation to avoid indicting Clinton no matter what the actual evidence was, that the FBI's peculiar behavior specifically relating to the Combetta deletions make much more sense. It would be an unprecedented and bold move to recommend indicting someone with Hillary Clinton's power right in the middle of her presidential election campaign.

It's naive to think that political factors don't play a role, on both sides. Consider that virtually every Democratic politician has been supportive of Clinton in her email controversy, or at least silent about it, while virtually every Republican has been critical of her about it or silent. Comey was appointed by Obama, and if the odds makers are right and Clinton wins in November, Comey will continue to be the FBI director under President Clinton. (Comey was appointed to a ten-year term, but Congress needs to vote to reappoint him after the election.) How could that not affect his thinking?

Comey could be trying to run out the clock, first delaying the revelations of the Combetta's deletions as much as possible, then releasing only selected facts to diminish the attention on the story.

interview, which came after Mills' April 2016 interview in which she claimed she'd never heard of any deletions. Thus, the only way to have Combetta take the fall for the deletions without Mills getting caught clearly lying to the FBI is by dodging the issue of what was said in the March 31, 2015 conference with a nonsensical claim of "attorney-client privilege."

Unfortunately, if that is Comey's plan, it looks like it's working. Since the FBI's final report came out on September 2, 2016, the mainstream media has largely failed to grasp the significance of Combetta and his deletions, focusing on far less important matters instead, such as the destruction of a couple of Clinton's BlackBerry devices with hammers—which actually was better than not destroying them and possibly letting them fall into the wrong hands.



The House Benghazi Committee in session in 2015. (Credit: C-SPAN3)

What happens next appears to largely be in the hands of Congressional Republicans, who no doubt will keep pushing to find out more, if only to politically hurt Clinton before the election. But it's also in the hands of you, the members of the general public. If enough people pay attention, then it will be impossible to sweep this controversy under the rug.

I believe that criminal behavior needs to be properly investigated and prosecuted, regardless of political persuasion and regardless of the election calendar. Combetta clearly committed a crime and he even confessed to do so, given what he admitted in his last FBI interview. If he got a limited immunity deal instead of blanket immunity, which is highly likely, it still would be possible to indict and convict him based on evidence outside of his interviews. That would help explain why he recently pled the Fifth, because he's still in legal danger.

But more importantly, who else is guilty with him? Logic and the available evidence strongly suggest that Clinton's lawyer Cheryl Mills at least knew about the deletions at the time they happened. Combetta has already confessed to criminal behavior—and yet somehow hasn't even been fired by PRN. If he didn't at least tell Mills and the others in the conference call about the



Paul Combetta and Bill Thornton plead the Fifth on September 13, 2016. (Credit: CSpan) 2017-03-23, 6:38 PM

The Hidden Letters, Other Evidence, Clinton's Lawyer, and the FBI's Response...
the gun-the...
deletions, there would be no logical reason to assert attorney-client privilege in the first place.

Only the nonsensical assertion of this privilege is preventing the evidence coming out that should lead to Mills being charged with lying to the FBI at a minimum. And if Mills knew, can anyone seriously believe that Clinton didn't know too?

As the saying goes, "it's not the crime, it's the cover up." This is an important story, and not just election season mudslinging. The public needs to know what really happened.

Note to Readers!

If you found this essay informative, check out the [Clinton email investigation timeline](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/category/clinton-email-server/timeline-long/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/category/clinton-email-server/timeline-long/>), as well as the [Clinton Foundation timeline](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/category/clinton-foundation/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/category/clinton-foundation/>), written and updated daily by the same author. Stay up to date with the newest timeline entries by checking out our [Recently Added Entries page](http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/recently-added-entries/) (<http://www.thompsonstimeline.com/recently-added-entries/>), and join our [Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1699656706954539) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1699656706954539>) for intelligent discussions about the latest breaking news throughout the day.

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Excellent work. You are doing a great service. Please continue.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Wolf Moon** • 6 months ago

Good stuff. Thank you for your service in explaining all of this. I still have to admit that it's confusing, but what I understand is not only angering in terms of Hillary Clinton, but very disheartening in terms of the Obama-Lynch-Comey FBI. They're trying to protect Hillary Clinton. It's horrifying that such a criminal could actually become President.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**MindBlindness** • 6 months ago

Wanted to add some first-hand information regarding Datto and cloud backups. At my past network consulting job I partnered with Datto and installed their products at multiple customer locations. The selling point of Datto IS their cloud backups. The default out of the box configuration of Datto products is to create a full "snapshot" of the server that is being backed up

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