

Emails With Intercept Editors Showing Censorship of My Joe Biden Article

Greenwald

22-28 minutes

Following are the communications I had over the last week with Intercept editors regarding my [article on Joe and Hunter Biden](#), which they refused to publish absent the removal of all sections critical of the front-running Democratic presidential candidate whom they uniformly and enthusiastically favor. This is the final exchange that [precipitated my resignation](#) from The Intercept and First Look Media, though, as I set out in my article of early today, by no means the sole or primary reason for leaving.



Recall that under my contract, and the practice of The Intercept over the last seven years, none of my articles is edited unless it presents the possibility of legal liability or complex original reporting, and not one of my articles in the last fifteen years — published with dozens of major media outlets around the world — has ever been retracted or even had appended to it a serious correction.

This article should never have been subject to the whims and views of editors at all, let alone this heavy-handed attempt to protect Joe Biden:

Oct. 27 “story memo” from Intercept Editor Peter Maas (emphasis added):

Oct. 27, 2020

Glenn, I have carefully read your draft and there is some I agree with and some I disagree with but am comfortable publishing. However, there is some material at the core of this draft that I think is very flawed. Overall I think this piece can work best **if it is significantly narrowed down to what you first discussed with Betsy — media criticism about liberal journalists not asking Biden the questions he should be asked more forcefully, and why they are failing to do that.**

Betsy agrees with me that the draft's core problem is the connection it often asserts or assumes between the Hunter Biden emails and corruption by Joe Biden. There are many places in which the explicit or implied position is a) the emails expose corruption by Joe Biden and b) news organizations are suppressing their reporting on it. Those positions strike me as foundations to this draft, and they also strike me as inaccurate, and that inaccuracy undercuts narrower points that are sound.

There are a couple of published emails and texts in which Hunter Biden or his business partners suggest or hint that Joe Biden might be aware of, or involved in, their dealings with China. Those passages have gotten the most attention, justifiably, but they are vague. In one of the China emails, for instance, there is reference to "the big guy" — who might be Joe Biden or might be someone else — and it's unclear whether Joe Biden, even if he is the big guy, was aware of an ownership share being discussed for him. Some of the most serious accusations, and potential corroboration, come not from the hard drive but from Tony Bobulinski's short press conference in which he didn't take questions, before he turned up at the debate as Trump's guest. As the Wall Street Journal news story on this matter reflected, it is newsworthy that someone has come forward alleging that Joe Biden was involved in Hunter's China dealings, and that Joe may have met some of Hunter's business partners. But it's very significant that the Journal found no corroborating evidence either of Joe Biden's involvement in any such deals, or those deals being consummated. These are major issues that I feel undermine the draft's thesis and are downplayed in the draft.

In addition, I feel there are substantive problems with the way you present the material on Ukraine. As your draft notes at one point, "It is true that no evidence, including these new emails, constitute proof that Biden's motive in demanding Shokin's termination was to benefit Burisma." However, there are many places in the piece where you say that the material raises serious questions about Biden's motives, yet you never present any evidence that supports such questions. You can certainly note that Shokin's successor let Burisma off the hook, but that's not evidence he was installed by Biden in order to achieve that end (indeed, it appears from the quote Taibbi cites that Biden initially had no idea who Shokin's proposed successor was). Despite years of reporting by a lot of journalists, American as well as Ukrainian, as well as an exhaustive GOP-led U.S. Senate investigation, no evidence has surfaced of Biden acting corruptly with respect to the replacement of Shokin. (Taibbi's findings are equivocal, I believe.) The reasonable conclusion, by now, would be that it most likely didn't happen.

A connected problem is that your draft asserts there is a massive suppression attempt by the entire major media to not report out these accusations, but then doesn't explore how major news organizations have done significant stories, and those stories, such as the Journal's, have not found anything of significance. The Times has also reported on the China deal and found the claims wanting. There are other pieces I can point to. You should give full notice to those —but once you do, the draft's overall thesis on suppression starts to wobble. Please note that I nonetheless believe you still have a valid albeit narrower argument about the failure of many journalists to confront the Biden family directly and aggressively with relevant questions about the materials and the legalized corruption of Hunter Biden that they document.

A somewhat related aspect that I don't think the draft gives fair notice of: the New York Post and perhaps the Wall Street Journal appear to be the only major news organizations that possess the contents of the hard drive. Maybe other news organizations have the

archive and haven't mentioned it, but absent evidence of that, I do think any story about a shortage of in-depth reporting on the archive would have to prominently note that most news organizations do not possess it. You spend quite a bit of the piece explaining why authentication efforts have been more than sufficient to satisfy any reasonable requirement of verification, but a key reason news organizations have cited for their lack of full confidence in the documents is their inability to access the hard drive; your draft does not mention that. It is hard to report on and authenticate an archive you do not possess.

Lastly, I think the disinformation issue should be handled with greater complexity. I think it's totally right to point out the haste with which some journalists and experts are talking about Russia's hand. But the argument that some people make about disinformation, and that I think you should address, is the way the materials are being used by Giuliani, the rightwing media, and Trump, to support an exaggerated and false narrative – a narrative that is not supported by the materials themselves. And I do think you should treat the origin story of the hard drive – that it came from the Delaware repair store – with a bit more skepticism. It's true that nothing has emerged yet to significantly undermine it, but it remains a very strange story surrounded by many unanswered questions.

Returning to my suggestion at the top of this memo, I think the draft could work if it is revised and shortened to focus on the sections about liberal media bias, about Joe Biden not being directly asked questions as much as he should (using your submitted questions to center that), and how all of this contributed to sub-optimal amounts of reporting on the corruption allegations, which, although they aren't backed by any evidence implicating Joe Biden himself, nonetheless reveal greater detail about how his family has used his name for profit. This version could be around 2000 words, which is enough to cover the ground I've outlined here.

I realize that I'm asking for a significant revision, but it's what I believe the draft needs, and Betsy concurs. Please let me know what you think. Bests, Peter

Senior Editor The Intercept

My response that evening:

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject:Re: Hunter Biden storyDate:Tue, 27 Oct 2020 22:55:36 -0300From:Glenn Greenwald <glenn.rio@theintercept.com>To:Peter Maass <xxxxxx@firstlook.org>, Betsy Reed <xxxx@theintercept.com>

Hi Peter - Thanks for reviewing this promptly.

I don't agree that the sections regarding the serious questions raised by the emails that Biden should have to answer are either unnecessary or inaccurate. **While I'm willing to talk about any specific factual inaccuracies you think are present, I'm not willing to remove those sections** -- in part because I think that discussion is important in its own right, but also because the discussion of why the media should be pursuing this story more aggressively, and why they were wrong to try to bury it, requires demonstrating that there's a real story here that deserves coverage.

I believe I was quite careful not to say that the emails prove Biden had a corrupt motive. In fact, as you note, I explicitly say that the emails do not prove that. But if Biden caused the firing of a prosecutor which -- intended or not -- ended up benefiting a company paying his son, then to me it seems obvious that these new materials (including ones suggesting Biden was going to meet with Burisma executives) along with other previously reported facts raise questions about Biden's motives (Taibbi's reporting cites conversations where Biden was asked if Lutsenko would be an acceptable replacement, and Biden said yes; in any event, he released the \$1 billion only after the replacement was named).

As I said, if you have sentences you believe are factually inaccurate and identify them, I'm willing as always to talk about how to modify them so that the inaccuracies are cured. I don't see any inaccuracies pointed to in your memo: only reasons why you don't see the evidence the way I see it.

But if the Intercept's position is that it won't publish any article by me that suggests that there are valid questions about whether Joe Biden engaged in wrongdoing, then I think we should agree that the Intercept's position is that it is unwilling to publish the article I want to publish about the Democratic front-runner. Under my contract, if TI decides it does not want to publish something I want to publish, then I have the right to publish it elsewhere, which is a right I would exercise with this article.

Given the obvious time urgency of the article with the election approaching, I'd appreciate you're letting me know ASAP about what you want to do. Thanks,

Glenn

My response the next morning (emphasis added):

Peter -

Given the obviously significant new developments in this story last night, as well as the benefit of re-reading your memo, I just want to add a few more points to my response:

1) I want to note clearly, because I think it's so important for obvious reasons, that **this is the first time in fifteen years of my writing about politics that I've been censored -- i.e., told by others that I can't publish what I believe or think -- and it's happening less than a week before a presidential election, and this censorship is being imposed by editors who eagerly want the candidate I'm writing about critically to win the election.** Note that I'm not making claims there about motives: I'm just stating facts that are indisputably true.

I'm not saying your motive or anyone else's is a desire to suppress critical reporting about the Democratic presidential candidate you support in order to help him win. I obviously can't know your internal motives. It could be that your intense eagerness for Biden to win - - shared by every other TI editor in New York -- colors your editorial judgment (just as it's possible that my view that the Democratic Party is corrupt may be coloring mine: **that's why no journalist has a monopoly on truth sufficient to justify censoring others**).

But the glaring irony that I'm being censored for the first time in my career -- and that it's being done *by the news outlet that I created with the specific and explicit purpose of ensuring that journalists are never censored by their editors* -- is disturbing to me in the extreme. What a healthy and confident news organization would do -- as the New York Times recently did with its own Pulitzer-winning 1619 Project -- is air the different views that journalists have about the evidence and let readers decide what they find convincing, not force everyone to adhere to a top-down editorial line and explicitly declare that any story that raises questions about Biden's conduct is barred from being published now that he's the Democratic nominee.

2) Last night, Tony Bobulinski gave an hour-long prime time interview detailing very serious allegations about his work not just with the Biden family but Joe Biden himself to pursue the very deals in China that Biden denied any involvement in. Who he is and the details he provided makes the story inherently credible - certainly enough for a news outlet to acknowledge that serious questions about Biden's conduct have been raised. I'm obviously going to add a discussion of that interview in the draft for wherever I end up publishing it.

3) For almost every personal opinion you express about Biden that you claim I omitted, I actually already included it explicitly in the draft. Just a few examples:

- YOU: "But it's very significant that the Journal found no corroborating evidence either of Joe Biden's involvement in any such deals, or those deals being consummated. These are major issues that I feel undermine the draft's thesis and are downplayed in the draft."
- MY DRAFT: "Thus far, no proof has been offered by Bubolinski that Biden ever consummated his participation in any of those discussed deals. The Wall Street Journal [says](#) that it found no corporate records reflecting that a deal was finalized and that "text messages and emails related to the venture that were provided to the Journal by Mr. Bobulinski, mainly from the spring and summer of 2017, don't show either Hunter Biden or James Biden discussing a role for Joe Biden in the venture."
- YOU: "You can certainly note that Shokin's successor let Burisma off the hook, but that's not evidence he was installed by Biden in order to achieve that end."
- MY DRAFT: "It is true that no evidence, including these new emails, constitute proof that Biden's motive in demanding Shokhin's termination was to benefit Burisma."
- YOU: "A connected problem is that your draft asserts there is a massive suppression attempt by the entire major media to not report out these accusations, but then doesn't explore how major news organizations have done significant stories, and those stories, such as the Journal's, have not found anything of significance. The Times has also reported on the China deal and found the claims wanting."
- MY DRAFT: "The Wall Street Journal [says](#) that it found no corporate records reflecting that a deal was finalized and that "text messages and emails related to the venture that were provided to the Journal by Mr. Bobulinski, mainly from the spring and summer of 2017, don't show either Hunter Biden or James Biden discussing a role for Joe Biden in the venture."...The New York Times on Sunday [reached a similar conclusion](#): while no documents prove that such a deal was consummated, "records produced by Mr. Bobulinski show that in 2017, Hunter Biden and James Biden were involved in negotiations about a joint venture with a Chinese energy and finance company called CEFC China Energy."

I could go on and on.

What's happening here is obvious: you know that you can't explicitly say you don't want to publish the article because it raises questions about the candidate you and all other TI Editors want very much to win the election in 5 days. So you have to cast your censorship as an accusation -- an outrageous and inaccurate one -- that my article contains factually false claims, all as a pretext for alleging that my article violates The Intercept's lofty editorial standards and that it's being rejected on journalistic grounds rather than nakedly political grounds.

But your memo doesn't identify a single factual inaccuracy, let alone multiple ones. And that's why you don't and can't identify any such false claims. And that, in turn, is why your email repeatedly says that what makes the draft false is that it omits facts which -- as I just demonstrated -- the draft explicitly includes.

4) Finally, I have to note what I find to be the incredible irony that The Intercept -- which has published more articles than I can count that contain factually dubious claims if not outright falsehoods that are designed to undermine Trump's candidacy or protect Joe Biden -- is now telling me, someone who has never had an article retracted or even seriously corrected in 15 years, that my journalism doesn't meet the editorial requirements to be published at the Intercept.

It was The Intercept that took the lead in falsely claiming that publication by the NY Post was part of a campaign of "Russian disinformation" -- and did so by (a) uncritically citing the allegations of ex-CIA officials as truth, and (b) so much worse: omitting the sentence in the letter from the ex-CIA officials admitting they had no evidence for that claim. In other words, the Intercept -- in the only article that it bothered to publish that makes passing reference to these documents -- did so only by mindlessly repeating what CIA operatives say. And it turned out to be completely false. This -- CIA stenography -- is what meets the Intercept's rigorous editorial standards:

"The U.S. intelligence community had previously warned the White House that Giuliani has been the target of a Russian intelligence operation to disseminate disinformation about Biden, and the FBI has been investigating whether the strange story about the Biden laptop is part of a Russian disinformation campaign. This week, a group of former intelligence officials issued a letter saying that the Giuliani laptop story has the classic trademarks of Russian disinformation."

The Intercept deleted from that quotation of the CIA's claims this rather significant statement: "we do not have evidence of Russian involvement."

Repeatedly over the past several months, I've brought to Betsy's attention false claims that were published by The Intercept in articles that were designed to protect Biden and malign Trump. Some have been corrected or quietly deleted, while others were just left standing.

This rigorous editorial process emerges only when an article deviates from rather than recites the political preferences of The Intercept and/or the standard liberal view on political controversies. That The Intercept is now reduced to blindly citing the evidence-free accusations about foreign adversaries from John Brennan and James Clapper -- and, worse, distorting what they said to make it even more favorable to Biden than these agents of disinformation were willing to do -- is both deeply sad and embarrassing to me as one of the people on whose name, credibility and reputations the Intercept has been built and around which it continues to encourage readers to donate money to it.

I'm well aware of the gravity of what I'm saying about The Intercept. This is not the first time I've said it to Betsy. But obviously, telling me that I can't publish a pre-election article about Joe Biden that expresses views that have been ratified by some of the nation's most accomplished journalists -- including but by no means limited to Matt Taibbi -- is even more grave.

Response of Betsy Reed yesterday

Our intention in sending the memo was for you to revise the story for publication. However, it's clear from your response this morning that you are unwilling to engage in a productive editorial process on this article, as we had hoped.

It would be unfortunate and detrimental to The Intercept for this story to be published elsewhere.

I have to add that your comments about The Intercept and your colleagues are offensive and unacceptable.

Betsy

Subject: Resignation
Date: Thu, 29 Oct 2020 10:01:59 -0300
From: Glenn Greenwald <glenn.rio@theintercept.com>
To: Michael Bloom <xxxxxx.media>, Betsy Reed <xxxxxx@theintercept.com>

Michael -

I am writing to advise you that I have decided that I will be resigning from First Look Media (FLM) and The Intercept.

The precipitating (but by no means only) cause is that The Intercept is attempting to censor my articles in violation of both my contract and fundamental principles of editorial freedom. The latest and perhaps most egregious example is an opinion column I wrote this week which, five days before the presidential election, is critical of Joe Biden, the candidate who happens to be vigorously supported by all of the Intercept editors in New York who are imposing the censorship and refusing to publish the article unless I agree to remove all of the sections critical of the candidate they want to win. All of that violates the right in my contract with FLM to publish articles without editorial interference except in very narrow circumstances that plainly do not apply here.

Worse, The Intercept editors in New York, not content to censor publication of my article at the Intercept, are also demanding that I not exercise my separate contractual right with FLM regarding articles I have written but which FLM does not want to publish itself. Under my contract, I have the right to publish any articles FLM rejects with another publication. But Intercept editors in New York are demanding I not only accept their censorship of my article at The Intercept, but also refrain from publishing it with any other journalistic outlet, and are using thinly disguised lawyer-crafted threats to coerce me not to do so (proclaiming it would be "detrimental" to The Intercept if I published it elsewhere).

I have been extremely disenchanted and saddened by the editorial direction of The Intercept under its New York leadership for quite some time. The publication we founded without those editors back in 2014 now bears absolutely no resemblance to what we set out to build -- not in content, structure, editorial mission or purpose. I have grown embarrassed to have my name used as a fund-raising tool to support what it is doing and for editors to use me as shield to hide behind to avoid taking responsibility for their mistakes (including, but not only, with the Reality Winner debacle, which I was publicly blamed despite having no role in it, while the editors who actually were responsible for those mistakes stood by silently, allowing me to be blamed for their errors and then covering-up any public accounting of what happened, knowing that such transparency would expose their own culpability).

But all this time, as things worsened, I reasoned that as long as The Intercept remained a place where my own right of journalistic independence was not being infringed, I could live with all of its other flaws. But now, not even that minimal but foundational right is being honored for my own journalism, supplanted by an increasingly authoritarian, fear-driven, repressive editorial team in New York bent on imposing their own ideological and partisan preferences on all writers while ensuring that nothing is published at The Intercept that contradicts their own narrow, homogenous ideological and partisan views: *exactly* what The Intercept, more than any other goal, was created to prevent.

I have asked my lawyer to get in touch with FLM to discuss how best to terminate my contract. Thank you - Glenn Greenwald