

## Clinton raved about Trans-Pacific Partnership before she rejected it

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Turns out Hillary Clinton isn't so down on the Trans-Pacific Partnership after all.

Leaked excerpts of speeches Clinton gave after resigning as secretary of state give strength to criticisms that her opposition to the TPP is little more than a campaign pose. The speeches show how highly she thought of the Asia-Pacific pact at the time and even reveal her hopes of tearing down trade barriers throughout the Western Hemisphere.

"We decided, and I led the way on this, that we were going to be a major presence" in Asia given that 40 percent of U.S. and world trade goes through the South China Sea, Clinton told New York business leaders in November 2013. The remarks, in which Clinton also said "we are in a competition for the future and we need more partners and fewer adversaries," seem to take credit for the Obama administration's "rebalance" toward Asia, of which TPP is the economic centerpiece.

The revelations contained in the excerpts put Clinton in a vulnerable position just before the second presidential debate and could jeopardize support in battleground states like Pennsylvania and Ohio. Her Republican rival Donald Trump has repeatedly raised questions about the sincerity of Clinton's opposition to the TPP and has challenged her to disavow the pact.

A spokesman for the Clinton campaign wouldn't comment on the leak except to blame Russia for hacking election-related emails, noting that information in previously hacked Democratic emails had been altered before release.

On Friday, "the U.S. government removed any reasonable doubt that the Kremlin has weaponized WikiLeaks to meddle in our election and benefit Donald Trump's candidacy," campaign spokesman Glen Caplin said, referring to Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and National Intelligence Director James Clapper's assertion that Moscow had deployed hackers to influence the U.S. election. "We are not going to confirm the authenticity of stolen documents released by [Wikileaks founder and editor-in-chief] Julian Assange, who has made no secret of his desire to damage Hillary Clinton."

Clinton came out against the TPP agreement one year ago Friday, two days after the Obama administration clinched the deal with 11 other Pacific Rim countries following a marathon round of negotiations in Atlanta. Although Clinton had traveled the world in support of TPP as President Barack Obama's secretary of state, she told the "PBS Newshour" that the final agreement didn't meet the "high bar" she set for the pact.

Clinton has since said repeatedly that she won't support trade agreements that don't produce jobs, raise wages or protect national security, but she has also emphasized the necessity of engaging in trade with other countries.

"Well, I think that trade is an important issue," Clinton said during the first presidential debate last month in response to Trump's call for renegotiating U.S. trade agreements. "Of course, we are 5 percent of the world's population; we have to trade with the other 95 percent. And we need to have smart, fair trade deals."

The excerpts released by WikiLeaks on Friday, which the group says came from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's email account, don't change that narrative. But they do show how confident Clinton was in the outcome of the deal.

Back in May 2013, for example, Clinton said "it was a good sign" that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agree to join the trade talks.

"That is something that we tried to get prior prime ministers to commit to, and they were under pressure from the car industry and from the rice farmers and others, but he did say Japan wants to be part of the TPP," Clinton said in a speech at a New York-based asset management firm. "If they follow through on that, that will be a good sign."

Longtime trade watchers said they didn't see major surprises in the excerpts. "In my opinion, there is no smoking gun, no 'gotcha' snippets, in these comments," said Dan Ikenson, director of the trade policy center at the Cato Institute, a free market think tank.

In her race this year for the White House, Clinton "hasn't disavowed trade or trade agreements altogether, but has expressed her opposition to 'this' TPP, which is perfectly in the tradition of Clintonian dissembling," Ikenson said. "Opposing 'this' TPP also provides Clinton with enormous latitude to flip-flop again."

Jeffrey Schott, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, agreed that nothing in the excerpts "seems inconsistent with her positions on trade today."

"As I understand her position, she is against TPP in its current form but is open to moving forward with TPP if it is restructured in some way," Schott added. "The No. 1 issue that is cited as part of the fix for TPP is provisions that prohibit currency manipulation."

Not surprisingly, the Trump campaign casts Clinton's comments in a more sinister light, suggesting it showed she was the mastermind behind the TPP.

"What rattles around in the globalist brain of Hillary Clinton as she flits from special interest group to special interest with her money-grubbing hands out should scare every American worker worried about losing his or her job to off shoring," said Peter Navarro, an economics

professor at the University of California-Irvine. “Everywhere we look we see more evidence of her puppet mastery behind the Trans-Pacific Partnership. If only she would tell the voters the same thing she tells her large corporate donors, there would be truth in political advertising — and Donald Trump in the White House.”

In that regard, foes of the agreement might be unsettled by Clinton’s praising the TPP as a force for good in the fast-growing region, as she did in January 2015 when she told a Canadian banking group that the United States and Canada were “working together with a group of open market democracies along the Pacific Rim – Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile – to expand responsible trade and economic cooperation.”

Throughout the campaign, Trump has tried to tar her with responsibility for the North American Free Trade Agreement, the 22-year-old pact that was negotiated by the administration of Republican President George Bush and then pushed through Congress by her husband, Bill Clinton, when he was president.

As far back as her run for president in 2008, Clinton has said she wanted to renegotiate NAFTA to get better terms for the United States. But in a speech at a Brazilian bank conference in 2013, she laid out a vision for trade throughout the Americas.

“My dream is a hemispheric common market, with open trade and open borders, sometime in the future with energy that is as green and sustainable as we can get it, powering growth and opportunity for every person in the hemisphere,” Clinton said.

That optimistic view is in line with her voting record in the Senate, where she supported free trade deals with Singapore, Chile, Australia, Morocco and Oman. But in 2005, when the 2008 presidential race was on the horizon, she sided with labor groups and most other Democrats and voted against a free trade deal with five countries in Central America and the Dominican Republic on the grounds it did not do enough to protect workers and the environment.

Clinton also skipped a vote on a free trade deal with Peru as the 2008 campaign was heating up and opposed trade deals with Colombia, Panama and South Korea while running for president.

Later, the Obama administration negotiated changes to those three trade deals to make them more acceptable to Democrats, and she lobbied Congress to pass the pacts -- setting the precedent for Clinton to take the same approach to the TPP pact.

Meanwhile, Dan DiMicco, a former head of the Nucor steel company who is advising the Trump campaign, pounced on a speech Clinton gave to a scrap metal recycling group in November 2014 as evidence of how “little she understands about trade issues.”

Clinton expressed delight in that speech “to learn that scrap products are a key export for the United States. By helping meet the demands for raw materials from emerging economies in Asia and elsewhere, you’re improving our trade balance and fueling our economic recovery. We’re talking about \$20 to \$30 billion in exports every year,” she said.

But since scrap is the basic raw material for 70 percent of U.S. steel production, DiMicco charged that “exporting our scrap to China drives up scrap prices for U.S. producers, even as

China's state-owned and state-subsidized companies blatantly and illegally dump the steel they make with U.S. scrap onto the American market."

"So America's steel industry gets hammered at both ends with runaway pricing on their raw materials and then predatory-priced steel squeezing the life out of the U.S. Steel Industry. Hillary is absolutely clueless about any of this, which is why rank-and-file steelworkers are defecting to Trump in droves," DiMicco said.

However, earlier this week, the United Steelworkers union held a press conference to highlight a Newsweek report that said Trump might have circumvented U.S. trade laws to import Chinese steel. "We're going to handbill every one of our plants in America, whether they're in Arizona or the Mahoning Valley in Ohio," USW President Leo Gerard said. "We want the entire country to know this guy is nothing but a fraud."

Other speech excerpts released by WikiLeaks are less likely to draw fire from the right or left, including her insistence in remarks aimed at China that, "I'm all for free trade, but I'm also all for a reciprocity and a lot of times that is not coming back at us."

Clinton also talks generally about the need to boost trade, resist protectionism and make sure other countries follow the rules.

In reference to talks on the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union, she predicted in 2013 that negotiations would "come down, as it often does, to agriculture, particularly French agriculture, and we'll just have to see how much we can get done by that process."

She also expressed a certain wariness of how serious the EU was about the talks. "I would like to see us go as far as we possibly can with a real agreement, not a phony agreement," Clinton said. "You know, the EU signs agreements all the time with nearly everybody, but they don't change anything. They just kind of sign them and see what comes of it."