

able to track what United States senators and the people who worked for them, and influenced them, were seeing [at different moments] online—and make sure that no potential negative comment passed without a tweet.

As she explained how the process worked, I was struck by how naive the assumption of a “state of nature” must seem in an information environment that is mediated less and less by experienced editors and reporters with any real prior knowledge of the subjects they write about. “People construct their own sense of source and credibility now,” [the staffer told me]. “They elect whoever they’re going to believe.” For those in need of more traditional-seeming forms of validation, handpicked Beltway insiders like Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic* and Laura Rozen of *Al-Monitor* helped retail the administration’s narrative. “Laura Rozen was my RSS feed,” [the staffer said]. “She would just find everything and retweet it.”

Rhodes’s messaging campaign was so effective not simply because it was a perfectly planned and executed example of digital strategy, but also because he was personally involved in guiding the deal itself.

In the interest of time, I am going to skip over a few paragraphs that tell how Jake Sullivan and other administration players traveled to Oman to secretly meet with the Iranians in the summer of 2012.

The White House point person during the later stage of the negotiations was Rob Malley, a favored troubleshooter who is currently running negotiations that could keep the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in power. During the course of the Iran talks, Malley told me, he always kept in close contact with Rhodes. “I would often just call him and say, ‘Give me a reality check,’” Malley explained. “He could say, ‘Here is where I think the president is, and here is where he will be.’” He continued, “Ben would try to anticipate: Does it make sense policywise? But then he would also ask himself: How do we sell it Congress? How do we sell it to the public? What is it going to do to our narrative?”

Malley is a particularly keen observer of the changing art of political communication; his father . . . who was born in Cairo, edited [a] politics magazine . . . and proudly pro-

vided a platform for Fidel Castro and Yasir Arafat, in the days when the leaders’ words might take [several] weeks to travel from Cuba or Cairo to Paris. “The Iran experience was the place where I saw firsthand how policy, politics and messaging all had to be brought together, and I think that Ben is really at the intersection of all three. He reflects and he shapes [all three] at the same time.”

As Malley and representatives of the State Department, including Wendy Sherman and Secretary of State John Kerry, engaged in formal negotiations with the Iranians, to ratify details of a framework that had already been agreed upon, Rhodes’s war room did its work on Capitol Hill and with reporters. In the spring of last year, legions of arms-control experts began popping up at think tanks and on social media, and then became key sources for hundreds of often-clueless reporters. “We created an echo chamber,” he admitted, when I asked him to explain the onslaught of freshly minted experts [who were] cheerleading for the deal. [He continued:] “They were saying things that validated what we had given them to say.”

When I suggested that all this dark metafictional play seemed a bit removed from rational debate over America’s future role in the world, Rhodes nodded. “In the absence of rational discourse, we are going to discourse the [expletive] out of this,” he said. “We had test drives to know who was going to be able to carry our message effectively, and how to use outside groups like Ploughshares, the Iran Project and whomever else [they needed to use]. So we knew the tactics that worked” [he said]. He is [very] proud of the way he sold the Iran deal. “We drove them crazy,” he said of the deal’s opponents.

Yet Rhodes bridled at the suggestion that there has been anything deceptive about the way the agreement itself was sold. “Look,” [he said] “with Iran, in a weird way, these are state-to-state issues. They’re agreements between governments. Yes, I would prefer that it turns out that Rouhani and Zarif . . . are real reformers who are going to be steering this country into the direction I believe it can go in, because their public is educated and, in some respects, pro-American. But we are not betting on [any of] that.”

Do you all remember what we heard last summer when they were testifying before us? We never heard this. We never heard this was the spin, but they didn’t actually believe it. But now here, when the guy’s thinking about his next step in life, we hear the real story. I will continue.

In fact, Rhodes’s passion seems to derive not from any investment in the technical specifics of sanctions or centrifuge arrays, or any particular optimism about the future course of Iranian politics and society. Those are matters for the negotiators and area specialists. Rather, it derived from his own sense of urgency of radically reorienting American policy in the Middle East in order to make the prospect of American involvement in the region’s future wars a lot less likely. When I asked him whether the prospect of this same kind of far-reaching spin campaign being run by a different administration is something that scares him, he admitted that it does. “I mean, I’d prefer a sober, reasoned public debate, after which members of Congress reflect and take a vote. . . . But that’s impossible” [he concluded].

Mr. President, truth is bigger than talking points, and self-government deserves more than spin. Does President Obama think there is such a thing as domestic propaganda? Does he think it is OK? Do we in this Chamber think it is OK?

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 2:15 P.M.  
TOMORROW

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order as a further mark of respect to the late Senators Conrad Burns of Montana and Bob Bennett of Utah.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 7:10 p.m., adjourned until Tuesday, May 10, 2016, at 2:15 p.m.