

Stop the revolving door: fossil fuel policy influencers | Corporate Europe Observatory

25.10.2021

21–27 minutes



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We are already feeling the impacts of the climate emergency, with record-breaking storms, floods, droughts and fires. Over two-thirds of man-made greenhouse gas emissions come from the fossil fuel industry, and its capture of our political systems is a major obstacle to tackling this crisis.

For decades, fossil fuel companies have [lobbied against effective climate action](#) at the national, EU and international levels, blocking policies to cut emissions and leave fossil fuels in the ground. Their bag of [lobbying tricks](#) includes privileged access, huge lobby spending and [revolving doors](#). The result is the corporate capture by the fossil fuel industry of the EU decision-making process, and the normalisation of fossil fuel interests and priorities across all political institutions.

New research by Fossil Free Politics members Corporate Europe Observatory, Friends of the Earth Europe and Food & Water Action Europe explores 71 revolving door cases involving the public sector (national governments and agencies, the EU, and international institutions) and just six Big Energy firms and five of their lobby groups between 2015 - 2021 (the full data and methodology is [here](#)). This content is the sole responsibility of Corporate Europe Observatory, Friends of the Earth Europe and Food & Water Action Europe and should not be regarded as reflecting the position of any of the more than 200 organisations supporting the call for fossil free politics, including the founders of Fossil Free Politics. Below we highlight some of the many cases of public servants and elected representatives who have gone through the revolving door to corporate jobs with fossil fuel companies or their representatives, and officials who have moved to the public sphere from roles in these companies.

Key figures:

Between 2015 and 2021, six fossil fuel giants (Shell, BP, Total, Equinor, ENI and Galp) and five of their lobby groups (Hydrogen Europe, Eurogas, FuelsEurope, IOGP and CEFIC) were involved in the following:

- 71 revolving door cases.

- 568 meetings with top level officials from the European Commission (an average of 1.5 meetings every week over a seven-year period) These meetings are only the tip of the iceberg. They cover only the Commissioners, Cabinets, and Directors-Generals, the only ones who are required to declare their meetings with lobbyists. There are many more unregistered meetings with officials. We have asked for a list of these meetings but in most cases got no response; when we did receive answers there was very minimal disclosure
- Lobbying in Europe to the tune of over €170 million

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As COP26 begins in Glasgow, we have seen no real action despite the Paris Agreement [commitments](#). To reach the Paris goal of keeping warming below 1.5°C, almost 60 per cent of oil and gas reserves and 90 per cent of coal [must remain](#) in the ground. Yet big oil and gas majors have merely pledged 'net zero' climate plans, a convenient cloak for [business-as-usual and false solutions](#). Their proposals involve a variety of risky technologies and deeply flawed schemes: carbon markets, carbon capture and storage (CCS) and hydrogen for example. At the heart of these pledges are projections that would actually increase their production of gas. This smokescreen allows for continued emissions and will have significant negative social and environmental impacts when deployed at scale. It is also a distraction from the rapid implementation of a drop in fossil fuel consumption that we urgently need, and their replacement with [real alternatives](#). Nonetheless, the majority of political institutions embrace the false solutions engineered by the fossil fuel industry.

Revolving door rules are inadequate, and regulators turn a blind eye to possible conflicts of interest whereby Big Energy benefits from the know-how and contact books of insiders. This is not simply a case of individual wrongdoing but a systemic problem across institutions.

These revolving door cases demonstrate just how normalised the model, assumptions, power and culture of the fossil fuel industry have become.

The question of the influence of oil and gas companies in political life could not be more significant. Whether they are [opposing or delaying environmental action](#), pushing to defend dirty energy investments at the cost of [human rights](#), securing diplomatic deals with third [countries](#), fuelling [conflict](#), or playing [powerful roles](#) in economics and energy ministries, we need a functioning firewall between public officials and those companies most responsible for fuelling and perpetuating climate change.

Revolving Door Cases

**FROM COP21 TO COP26
FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY CAPTURE OF
CLIMATE POLITICS**

SOME REVOLVING DOOR CASES

Atlem Gharbi
From TotalEnergies' Deputy Vice-President of International Affairs
To Advisor on North Africa and Middle East to the French President

Majdi Abed
From French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
To Vice President International Public Affairs at TotalEnergies

Maria van der Hoeven
From Executive Director of the International Energy Agency
To Independent Member of TotalEnergies' Board of Directors

Aurelien Hamelle
General Counsel at TotalEnergies and the French Agency of Financial Markets

TOTAL
Since 2015, the year of COP21:

- had **15** cases of revolving door
- Met with top-level officials from the EU Commission **31 TIMES**
- spent close to **€13 MILLION** lobbying the EU

Logos: Fossil Free Politics, TotalEnergies, Corporate Europe Observatory, Friends of the Earth Europe, Food & Water Action Europe.

Total

Since 2015, the year of COP21, TotalEnergies has been [connected](#) with:

- 15 revolving door cases
- 31 meetings with European Commission elite
- EU lobbying costs of close to €13 million

TOTAL Revolving Door Case 1: [Ahlem Gharbi](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2019-2021: Director at the French Agency for Development

2017-2019: Cabinet of the French President, Advisor on North Africa and the Middle East

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2015-2017: Deputy Vice President of International Affairs at Total

Ahlem Gharbi was Total's Deputy Vice President of International Affairs from 2015-2017, during which time she regularly participated in events on French foreign policy in the Arab world. In May 2017, she became Advisor to the French President on North Africa and the Middle East. Between April 2019 and September 2021 she was Director at the French Agency for Development, and she was recently appointed General Director of the French Institute in Algeria.

TOTAL Revolving Door Case 2: [Majdi Abed](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2000-2019: several positions within the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, including General Consul in Dubai

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2019-present: Vice President of International Public Affairs at Total

Majdi Abed spent more than 19 years at the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2000-2019), holding important positions such as General Consul, Deputy Director and Political Advisor. This gave him access to key diplomatic information. He left public office in August 2019, and just one month later was hired by Total as the company's Vice President for International Public Affairs.

TOTAL Revolving Door Case 3: [Maria van der Hoeven](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2016-2019: Member of the EU Commission [Expert Group](#) High-Level Panel of the European Decarbonisation Pathways Initiative

2011-2015: [Executive Director](#) of the [International Energy Agency](#) 2002-2010: Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science & Economic Affairs

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2016-present: Independent Member of Total's Board of Directors

Maria van der Hoeven served as a minister in several departments in the Netherlands (2002-2010) before being appointed Executive Director of the International Energy Agency (2011-2015). In 2016, she was appointed as Independent Member of Total's Board of Directors. During this same period (2016-2019), she joined a European Commission Expert Group on decarbonisation.

At a recent [webinar](#) co-organised by oil and gas company Petronas, van der Hoeven claimed: "There is no doubt the world is heading towards net zero 2050, and fossils will be part of that."

TOTAL Revolving Door Case 4: [Aurelien Hamelle](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2020-present: Member of the Sanctions Commission at the French Agency of Financial Markets

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2016-present: Total Group General Counsel

While being Group General Counsel at Total, [Aurelien Hamelle](#) has also been part of the Sanctions Commission of the French Agency of Financial Markets (AMF) since September 2021. The Sanctions Commission is in charge of imposing sanctions on any person or company whose practices contravene laws and regulations that fall within the jurisdiction of the AMF.



Shell

Since 2015, the year of COP21, **Shell** has been [connected](#) with:

- 10 revolving door cases
- 85 meetings with the European Commission elite
- EU lobbying costs of close to €28 million

SHELL Revolving Door Case 1: [Gerrit Zalm](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2017: Chair of the negotiations to form a new Dutch government

1994-2007: Dutch Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2013-present: Non-Executive Independent Director at Shell

Gerrit Zalm served as a Dutch Minister for 13 years, from 1994 until 2007. He was nominated to be a Non-Executive Independent Director at Shell in 2013. In 2017, Zalm chaired negotiations to form a new Dutch Government whilst still being paid by Shell (€117,000 that year). Under Zalm's supervision, according to an [investigation](#), a policy Shell had demanded for years (the elimination of the dividend tax) was included in the Dutch Government's coalition agreement in 2017.

Together, the EU and European governments hand out an estimated [€112 billion plus](#) each year to prop up fossil fuels.

SHELL Revolving Door Case 2: [Floris van Hövell](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2003-2012: Diplomat for the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Argentina and the USA

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2012-2014: seconded by the Dutch Government to Shell as Government Relations Advisor

2014-2017: Senior Project Advisor of Government Relations at Shell

2017-present: Senior EU Affairs Manager at Shell

Following a long diplomatic career, Floris van Hövell was seconded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Shell as its

Government Relations Advisor in 2012. Following this secondment, he was hired as a Senior Project Advisor on Government Relations and is now the Senior EU Affairs Manager at Shell. In this role he is leading advocacy for Shell's hydrogen business, for its broader international energy portfolio, and for the company's membership in Hydrogen Europe, Eurogas, IOGP and others.

SHELL Revolving Door Case 3: [Tabé van Hoolwerff](#)

- **Public or political role:**

January 2021-present: Senior Policy Advisor Sustainable Industry at the Dutch Ministry of Economics and Climate

2011-2013: Senior Legal Advisor in different Dutch ministries

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2014-2020: Various positions at Shell, the latest being Global Legal Operations Counsel

Tabé van Hoolwerff has moved from public office to Shell and then back to public office again. He held two senior legal advisor positions in different ministries before Shell hired him for various legal advisory positions starting in 2014. After seven years at Shell, van Hoolwerff returned to public office as a Senior Policy Advisor on Sustainable Industry at the Dutch Ministry of Economics and Climate.

SHELL Revolving Door Case 4: [Iain Lobban](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2008-2014: Chief of the UK's largest intelligence agency, GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters)

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2015: Advisor to Shell

After retiring from the leading UK surveillance agency in 2014, Iain Lobban was hired by Shell as an advisor on cybersecurity issues.

SHELL Revolving Door Case 5: [Joanna Kuenssberg](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2014-2018: British High Commissioner to Mozambique

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2018-2021: Shell's Vice President of Government Relations with Russia and CIS

2021-present: Shell's Vice President of Corporate Relations with MENA and CIS

After holding an important diplomatic position as British High Commissioner to Mozambique for four years (leading the UK's support for the private sector among other tasks), Joanna Kuenssberg was hired by Shell in 2018 as its Vice President of Government Relations with Russia and the CIS, and since 2021 with the MENA and CIS regions.

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CLIMATE POLITICS**

BP
Since 2015, the year of COP21:

- had **5** cases of revolving door
- Met with top-level officials from the EU Commission **47 TIMES**
- spent close to **€18 MILLION** lobbying the EU

Some revolving door cases

John Sawers
From Chief of the UK Secret Intelligence Service, MI6
To Independent non-executive director of BP Global

Helge Lund
From Chair of Statoil (now known as Equinor) while member of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Group on Sustainable Energy
To Chairman of the Board of BP Plc

Nick Houghton
From UK Chief of the defence staff
To adviser at BP

bp

Corporate Europe Observatory

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BP

Since 2015, the year of COP21, BP has been [connected](#) with:

- 5 revolving door cases
- 47 meetings with the European Commission elite
- EU lobbying costs of close to €18 million

BP Revolving Door Case 1: [John Sawers](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2009-2014: Chief of the UK Secret Intelligence Service, MI6

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2015-present: Independent Non-Executive Director of BP Global

John Sawers is the former Chief of British Secret Intelligence Service or MI6 (2009-2014) and was UK's Ambassador to the United Nations for two years after serving as Political Director of the British Foreign Office. BP recruited the former diplomat and military expert as its Independent Non-Executive Director in 2015. Sawers has [earned](#) £699,000 (€821,031) with BP since 2015.

BP Revolving Door Case 2: [Nick Houghton](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2013-2016: Chief of the Defence Staff of the British Armed Forces

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2017-present: Advisor to BP

In 2016, Nick Houghton left his role as Chief of the Defence Staff, Britain's most senior military position. Since 2017 he has provided independent strategic advice to BP at the board level on the company's operations in Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, including advice on the related geopolitical risks such as crisis preparedness and response management. In 2020, Houghton [also became](#) an [advisor](#) to the artificial intelligence firm White Space, which focuses on the oil and gas industry and [works](#) closely with Shell.

BP Revolving Door Case 3: [Helge Lund](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2011-2014: Member of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Group on Sustainable Energy

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2019-present: Chairman of the Board of BP (joined BP board in 2018)

2004-2014: CEO of Statoil (now Equinor)

Helge Lund was a Member of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Group on Sustainable Energy for three years, until 2014, during which period he was also the CEO of Statoil, the Norwegian oil and gas company now known as Equinor. BP named him Chairman of the Board in 2019.

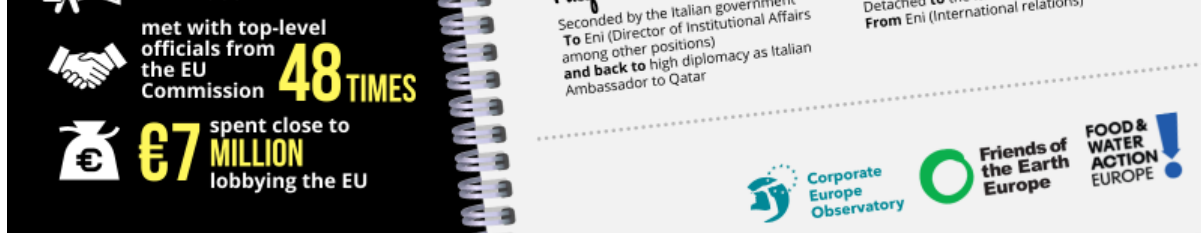
**FROM COP21 TO COP26
FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY CAPTURE OF
CLIMATE POLITICS**

ENI
Since 2015, the year of COP21:
had **10** cases of revolving door

Some revolving door cases

- Luca Giansanti**
From Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
To Senior Vice President, Head of European Government Affairs at Eni
- Pasquale Salzano**
- Lapo Pistelli**
From Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
To Director of Public Affairs at Eni
- Alfredo Tombolini**
Head to the Italian government

eni



Eni

Since 2015, the year of COP21, Eni has been [connected](#) with:

- 10 revolving door cases
- 48 meetings with the elite of the European Commission
- EU lobbying costs of close to €7 million

ENI Revolving Door Case 1: [Luca Giansanti](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2014-2018: Political Director (Director General for Political Affairs and Security), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy

2013-2014: Ambassador, Embassy of Italy in Tehran

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2019-present: Senior Vice President, Head of European Government Affairs at Eni

After holding important diplomatic roles – as an Ambassador to Iran and Political Director at Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Luca Giansanti was appointed as Eni's Senior Vice President, Head of European Government Affairs in 2019. He has participated in several events organised by EU media and trade groups affiliated to the fossil fuel industry together with EU climate and energy decision makers.

ENI Revolving Door Case 2: [Pasquale Salzano](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2017-2019: Italian Ambassador to Qatar

1999-2013: Diplomatic official, including Head of the G8-G20 Sherpa Office at the Italian Prime Minister's Office

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2011-2014: seconded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Eni as Head of International Institutional Relations and Head of the Eni office in the United States

2014-2017: Senior Vice President, then Executive Vice President and Director of Institutional Affairs at Eni

Pasquale Salzano was seconded in 2011 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Eni and became Head of International Institutional Relations and Head of the Eni office in the US. He was first appointed as Eni's Senior Vice President, and later as Executive Vice President and Director of Institutional Affairs. He became the Italian Ambassador to Qatar in 2017. Notably, the Italian state actually seconds officials to Eni and vice versa.

ENI Revolving Door Case 3: [Lapo Pistelli](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2013-2015: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

2004-2015: Member of the European Parliament and then the Italian Parliament

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2015-present: Various positions at Eni; since July 2020 Director of Public Affairs

After being elected as a European MEP and then an Italian MEP, Lapo Pistelli was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Italian Government in 2013. In 2015, the same year he left his high-level public office, he moved directly to Eni where he is now the Director of Public Affairs.

- **Public or political role**

2017-2019: seconded from Eni to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Directorate-General for Globalisation and Global Issues (DGMO)

- **Fossil fuel industry role**

2016-2019: International Relations at Eni

While working at Eni on international relations, Alfredo Tombolini was seconded to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Directorate-General for Globalisation and Global Issues to promote Italian investments abroad in the energy sector, i.e., directing the country's public financing.

ENI Revolving Door Case 5: [Natalie Tocci](#)

- **Public or political role**

2015-2019: appointed Special Advisor to Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

2020: [Appointed](#) Special Advisor to Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

- **Fossil fuel industry role**

2020: Appointed by the Italian government to three committees in the Eni Board of Directors.

Nathalie Tocci was Special Advisor to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission from 2015 to 2019. In 2020 she became a member of Eni's Board of Directors, as well as Special Advisor to Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission.

FoEE, CEO and ReCommon filed a [complaint](#) with the European Commission for this conflict of interest. Perhaps as a consequence, the European External Action Service has not yet given Tocci any mission in her [role](#) as Special Advisor.



Equinor

Since 2015, the year of COP21, **Equinor** has been [connected](#) with:

- 6 revolving door cases
- 49 meetings with the elite of the European Commission
- EU lobbying costs of close to €12 million

EQUINOR Revolving Door Case 1: [Amber Rudd](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2018-2019: Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. She also served as Minister for Women and Equalities.

2016-2018: UK Home Secretary

2015-2016: Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, leading the UK team in the Paris Climate Change Agreement

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2020-present: [Chair](#) of Equinor UK's International Advisory Group

After serving as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Equalities Minister, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Home Secretary while a Member of Parliament for Hastings and Rye, Amber Rudd was nominated Chair of Equinor UK's International Advisory Group in 2020. This group aims to provide the company with "diverse views and experiences" from its members.

Equinor claims that members of the Advisory Group don't represent the company. However, Rudd recently represented Equinor at an [event sponsored](#) by the company and organised by EU media network *Euractiv*. She noted during the event: "What I would like from the politicians who are coming ... is policy decisions that would allow businesses to develop the solutions."

Rudd [supports](#) the [development](#) of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology (the UK Government has been a key proponent). Equinor is planning a [controversial fossil hydrogen plant](#) in the UK, which will use fossil gas in combination with CCS. Although CCS is a costly technology that has [failed to deliver](#), the oil and gas industry (and the EU's [Hydrogen Strategy](#)) claim that it is 'low carbon' and are banking on it to capture the emissions created by producing hydrogen from fossil fuels.

EQUINOR Revolving Door Case 2: [Lotte Grepp Knutsen](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2009-2012: State Secretary in different Norwegian ministries

2021-present: State Secretary for the Norwegian Ministry of Finance

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2019-2021: Manager for Political and Public Affairs at Equinor

Lotte Grepp Knutsen worked for more than three years as State Secretary in Norway, until 2012, and was recruited by Equinor in 2019 as its Manager for Political and Public Affairs. She left that position in 2021 to return to the Norwegian Government, namely the Ministry of Finance, as State Secretary.

EQUINOR Revolving Door Case 3: [Stein Hernes](#)

- **Public or political role:**

2015-2018: Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Strategic Communication, NATO

- **Fossil fuel industry role:**

2019-present: Vice President of Corporate Sustainability, then Vice President of Political and Public Affairs at Equinor

After holding different public and political roles, Stein Hernes was recruited by Equinor as its Vice President for Corporate Sustainability and then Vice President Political and Public Affairs in 2019.

Conclusion

The sheer number of revolving door cases illustrates how serious the problem of conflict of interest is in climate policymaking. The EU's [revolving door rules](#) remain inadequate and poorly implemented. Meanwhile, UN climate negotiations often allow fossil fuel sponsorship, and members of the fossil fuel industry are part of official delegations. [Attempts](#) to regulate conflicts of interest at the UNFCCC – supported by governments representing 70 per cent of the world's population – have been blocked by the EU and others.

The fossil fuel industry's business model is threatened by the implementation of climate change policies that would limit global warming to 1.5°C. Their vested interests in rejecting or diluting any legislation that hurts their profits should exclude them from decision making on climate issues.

The removal of the irreconcilable interests of the fossil fuel industry from the arena of climate policy is at the core of [Fossil](#)

We demand:

- No conflicts of interest, no revolving door (a cooling-off period of five years for regular officials and staff; 10 years for high-level positions).
- No placements, secondments, internships, or sabbaticals from fossil fuel company staff in governments or vice versa.
- The implementation of a firewall to end fossil fuel industry access to decision making. No more meetings with the fossil fuel industry or its representatives.
- The EU should support the development of a conflict of interest policy at the UNFCCC.

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Blog

Revealed: BP's close ties with the UK government

Felicity Lawrence, Harry Davies

15–18 minutes

For the oil multinational BP, it was a historic moment – the signing of a joint venture to exploit the vast oil and gas reserves of [Russia's Arctic shelf with the Russian energy giant Rosneft](#). The deal was worth £10bn in share swaps.


The chief executive of Rosneft, Igor Sechin – then Russian deputy prime minister, key Putin ally and one of the most forbidding characters in the world of oil – would be coming to London to seal the agreement. Rosneft is majority owned by the Russian state, and BP urgently needed a senior British government figure to mark the alliance.

So, the night before the signing in January 2011, BP's managing director Iain Conn picked up the phone to the then secretary of state for energy and climate change, Chris Huhne. It was awkward, for Huhne had a long-standing engagement – [to give a speech at a Liberal Democrat dinner](#) on the Isle of Wight to an audience that would include key representatives of the island's renewable energy industry. There was, though, only ever going to be one winner.

Despite any doubts Huhne, a champion of a low-carbon economy, may have held, he agreed to be there, alongside Sechin, the former KGB officer variously dubbed 'the scariest man on earth' and 'Darth Vader'. Officials had quickly prepared briefings for Huhne, which discussed the "environmental sensitivities" about risky – and carbon costly – deep water drilling in the Arctic. If pressed on why he was "[publicly blessing](#)" the company behind one of the world's worst environmental disasters, Huhne was simply to say: "Russia is a valuable energy partner for the UK and a deal of this scale is a major development for the energy industry in both countries." But it was instead [Russia's contribution to "fuelling Europe"](#) in coming decades rather than fears over climate change that officials emphasised.

It helped that Conn and other senior BP executives had been in to visit Huhne just a couple of days earlier to discuss BP's interests. They had talked through the company's \$20bn (£13bn) exposure to its Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.



 A US coast guard fire boat battles the blazing remnants of the BP operated offshore oil rig, Deepwater Horizon, in the Gulf of Mexico.
Photograph: HO/AFP/Getty Images

Although the government viewed the financial hit as BP's problem, it was worried the oil giant's vast bill for the Gulf accident would hit many UK pension-holders, according to Tom Burke, former BP employee, now chairman of the environmental organisation E3G and advisor to Shell, Rio Tinto and Unilever. About 1.5% of UK pension industry money was invested in BP shares, which had plummeted. And BP had scrapped its dividend payments.

"Around [7% of UK pension fund annual income came from BP](#) at the time. A further 12% came from Shell, so nearly one-fifth of [pension funds were intricately linked](#) to the profits of these two oil and gas companies," explained Burke.

At that meeting, BP was assured by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (Decc) that it would do what it could,

with lawyers from the Treasury, the Foreign Office and the business department, to find “an operational solution” to allow [BP to reopen the major North Sea gas field](#) it owned jointly with Iran despite the EU’s sanction regime against that country.

The solution, a couple of years later, would be for Iran’s share of the profits to be held by the British government in a frozen account.

These extraordinary insights into the extreme closeness between the British government and one of its biggest companies came to light after a Freedom of Information (FoI) request. Nobody, perhaps, should be much surprised by it. After all, they have shared mutual interests since the first British involvement in commercial oil exploration in the Gulf over 100 years ago.

British governments realised that this company could fuel its economy and its war effort. By switching the Navy to running on BP’s oil, Winston Churchill helped ensure the survival of the struggling business that had begun life drilling speculatively in Persia as the First Exploitation Company. He then insisted on controlling this vital resource, and, in 1914, the government bought a majority share of the company, by now called Anglo-Persian [Oil](#).

British Petroleum, as it became in 1954, was privatised in 1979, when Mrs Thatcher sold a 5% stake to take the government’s share to 46%, a minority holding for the first time. It was only in 1987 that the government sold the last of its shares.

As one former Whitehall official put it: “The presumption that the British government should have an intimate relationship with big British multinationals especially BP and Shell was in the air you breathed.”

But, even after the sell-off, the place of BP in the life of the British nation – and at the heart of government – remains strong. Only last month, Downing Street told BP and city investors that it would not remain neutral if BP became the target of a foreign takeover.

And yet there is one big difference now: on climate change, the interests of the government, signed up to cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% on 1990 levels by 2050, are not aligned with those of BP, which is pressing on with the pace of fossil fuel exploration. Critics say BP’s business model of continuing to prospect for more reserves is at odds with attempts to limit carbon emissions to keep the rise in the Earth’s temperature below 2C, the widely-agreed threshold for dangerous climate change.

Keeping below that figure is at the heart of the [Guardian’s Keep it in the Ground campaign](#). It is calling on the world’s two largest health charities, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust to move their investments out of fossil fuel companies. Both are world leaders in health research who recognise the serious threat to public health posed by climate change, but they both hold significant holdings in fossil fuels. For BP specifically, the Gates Foundation’s Asset Trust has a £243m holding and Wellcome has £118m, according to the most recent figures.

Despite the UK government’s commitment to tackling climate change, documents released under the Freedom of Information Act show that BP and the British government are still hand-in-hand.

John Ashton, the UK’s top climate diplomat until 2012, fears they are caught in old habits.

He has been highly critical of the [oil companies’ failure to embrace the speed of change](#) needed.

“Britain’s overriding national interest is an effective response to climate change, which will require a carbon-free energy system within a generation or so,” Ashton told the Guardian. “This is an existential challenge to the oil and gas companies. They now face an uncomfortable choice between finding new business models, or clinging to the status quo of fossil fuel dependency and coming increasingly to be seen as enemies of the national interest.”

Not yet though. Documents from the Foreign Office reveal government policy that still barely distinguishes between the British national interest and the commercial interests of its main oil and gas companies.

The Foreign Office, for example, held its annual “BP high level dinner” last July, “to strengthen the strategic relationship between BP and the FCO on global economic and energy issues”, according to heavily redacted documents marked “sensitive” and “restricted”. All the top FCO directors from the head of the diplomatic service down through the directors of the main regions, to the heads of the FCO economic, strategy, and “prosperity” units, were on the attendees list.

Tensions were running high at the time. [Russia had annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea in March](#). The West would - in time - respond with [sanctions against Putin’s inner circle](#), including Sechin, and against Russian companies, including Rosneft.

The implications for western energy security and a company like BP were profound. [Europe imports a quarter of its gas from Russia](#), which also accounts for 13% of world oil production. BP was painfully exposed to any sanctions; by 2013 it had acquired a 20% minority shareholding in Rosneft.

The week before the annexation of Crimea, the British ambassador in Washington organised a dinner “at BP’s suggestion for the visit of BP’s chief executive of downstream operations” with several “local big hitters” from the State Department and US business.

In Moscow, immediately after the Russian Crimea move, the British ambassador met BP’s Russia [Energy](#) president to discuss BP’s exposure. A note of the conversation, marked “restricted and commercially sensitive”, and which is mostly redacted, says “BP’s equities in Russia were clear: \$14-15bn of investment in Rosneft”.

The inference: BP was in a fix. The British government was there to help. BP’s commercial interests would inform the precise detail of the inevitable sanctions against Russia.


If the stakes over BP and Rosneft were high geopolitically, elsewhere the British government’s support for the company was more straightforwardly commercial. The coalition agreement in 2010 promised – at Liberal Democrat insistence – to help move to a low-carbon economy. But the Foreign Office was being refocused by Conservative foreign secretary William Hague away from diplomacy towards the promotion of British trade.

It upgraded its presence to a full consular office in Calgary, Canada, in 2011 to support UK businesses investing in the region — [BP and Shell both have major tar sands projects in the area](#). Tar sands are among the dirtiest, most-carbon intensive of fossil fuels to exploit.

For BP, this intimate relationship with ministers and officials is as natural as it appears for Whitehall. “BP is a major UK-headquartered company with significant businesses and investments in the UK and worldwide. We employ around 15,000 people in this country and are currently undertaking a multi-billion pound investment programme in the UK North Sea. As such, we have regular meetings with various UK government departments who are interested in both our business and various issues involving our industry. Many of these are at the government’s request,” the company said in a statement to the Guardian.

A Department of Energy and Climate Change spokesperson echoed this position, saying: “For DECC to operate effectively it needs to have relationships with a range of key stakeholders in the energy sector, including BP. Regular meetings with these stakeholders allow government to be kept informed of new investment proposals, to explain government policy and to understand how company plans might fit into the wider policy context.”



 Prime minister David Cameron (second from right) with BP’s regional president Trevor Garlick (left), BP chief executive Bob Dudley (second left) and Simon Richardson (right), Clair Reservoir team leader at BP North Sea headquarters in Aberdeen. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

A key feature of this relationship is the revolving door between BP and government. It earned the company the moniker Blair Petroleum under Labour governments. It continues to revolve today, with former BP chief executive Lord Browne brought in to the Cabinet Office by the [Conservatives](#) in 2010 to help appoint business leaders to new boards of each government department, and former BP executive John Manzoni now chief executive of the Civil Service.

The door swung the other way last week, as BP appointed the recently-retired head of the UK’s secret intelligence services to its board. The former MI6 spy chief, Sir John Sawers, would bring invaluable geopolitical experience, said BP’s chairman.

The significance of all this for climate change is profound. Being embedded in Whitehall, it appears, has given the oil and gas multinationals confidence that the government will not act on emissions in a way that will restrict their growth.

Burke, at BP when Browne experimented with moving towards renewables, only to retreat after a shareholders’ savaging,

says the oil companies know climate change represents “an existential threat” to their business.

“They’ve worked it out. The only people who have done as much thinking as them on this are the military,” said Burke. BP is “certain that government won’t act on their obligation to keep the rise in global temperatures below 2C and in fact will be allies to keep the revenues flowing.”


Asked how the company reconciled the urgent need to cap dangerous greenhouse gas emissions with its exploration of new frontiers, BP said: “Affordable, secure energy is essential for economic prosperity and we forecast that global demand for energy is set to grow by nearly 40% by 2035. The International Energy Agency’s (IEA) estimates that by 2040 up to 60% of the fuel mix will still be fossil fuels; investment to develop oil and gas will continue to be needed.”

The trouble with that, as environmentalists point out, is that the IEA’s estimate from which BP takes comfort is based on capping CO2 emissions in the atmosphere at 450 parts per million. At that level, we have by scientific consensus only a 50% chance of preventing dangerous climate change.

The BP chief executives

John Browne (1995-2007)



 John Brown. Photograph: Dan Chung/Dan Chung for The Guardian


Lord John Browne, now 67, transformed BP from a second-tier oil company to a major player on the international stage. He became one of the most celebrated British businessmen and was dubbed the oil industry’s “sun king”.

Browne – who enjoyed close ties to both New Labour’s business-friendly elite and later David Cameron’s coalition – attempted to position BP as environmentally-minded, flirting with renewables and launching the “Beyond Petroleum” PR campaign.

Today, assessments of Browne’s record at BP are less gushing. Browne later admitted BP should have done more to prevent two major disasters that occurred on his watch and a long-term culture of ruthless cost cutting and risk taking, which began under Browne, has also been blamed for leading to the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010.

Tony Hayward (2007-2010)



 Tony Hayward. Photograph: Sean Gardner/Pool/Getty Images

Tony Hayward, who will be 58 on Thursday, was Lord Browne's "turtle". This was the nickname for Browne's indispensable right hand men who swiftly worked their way through company ranks – a reference to the cartoon superheroes.

After taking the top job, Hayward doubted whether solar and wind would ever compete with fossil fuels and closed Browne's renewables division. For BP it was, as the Financial Times put it, back to petroleum.

Hayward was forced to resign as oil continued to spill from BP's Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico. His response to the disaster was littered with "thoughtless" gaffes, angering Republican senators and environmentalists alike.

Two years later, Hayward was back. He became chief executive of Iraq-focussed oil company Genel Energy and last year became chairman of commodities giant Glencore Xstrata.

Bob Dudley (2010-present)

Bob Dudley, 59, arrived at BP in 1999 after its acquisition of the US oil company Amoco. In 2003, Dudley – a "nice guy" from a small town in Mississippi – became chief executive of BP's Russian joint venture TNK-BP but was forced to flee Moscow in 2008 under pressure from authorities.

In 2010, Dudley became chief executive amid an existential crisis for BP. His task: salvage the company as a viable business after the worst oil spill in US history.

Despite falling profits and shrinking shareholder returns, Dudley received a 25% total pay rise earlier this year which he accepted after implementing a raft of job cuts and missing safety targets.

The Gulf Coast Cleanup, BP and the Revolving Door

5–6 minutes

This week on the show, author Mark Leibovich uses the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill as a prime example of how disasters get “managed” in Washington. He tells Bill how, while the oil was still spilling, BP assembled a bipartisan “Beltway dream team” of lobbyists, PR and advertising consultants, and media strategists to respond to the crisis and begin rehabilitating the company’s brand.

Earlier this week, I wrote a post [summarizing recent developments](#) in the Gulf cleanup effort and BP’s growing resistance to paying out more money to victims. Last week the company sued the government over a ban denying future federal contracts. It was another litigious move in an increasingly aggressive legal strategy that started earlier this year.

Thursday afternoon we received a statement from BP press officer Jason Ryan responding to my post. It read:

“So far, we’ve paid \$14 billion in response and cleanup costs and more than 300,000 claims totaling \$12 billion for spill-related losses. And we’re not done yet. Last year, we signed an agreement to compensate the vast majority of remaining individuals and businesses with legitimate claims related to the Gulf spill. Unfortunately, that settlement has been misinterpreted. We respectfully disagree with that interpretation, which is allowing trial lawyers to file fictitious or inflated claims that could ultimately cost billions of dollars.

“On the issue of the recent oil spill contamination study you referenced it is already abundantly clear that this research is far less comprehensive and scientifically accurate than studies conducted by federal and state agencies. In fact, the study is based on a very small data set and it was not collected and analyzed in a uniform manner. By contrast, thousands of water samples were collected by NOAA, the FDA and other research teams, using established sampling methods. , with tests to measure the actual level of oil in the water. In those reputable tests, seafood has consistently tested 100 to 1,000 times lower than the safety thresholds established by the FDA.”

Out of habit, I Googled Jason Ryan — and was surprised that one of the first hits was a news story Ryan co-authored in May 2010, about a month after the spill started (it continued for nearly 4 months), titled “[BP’s Dismal Safety Record](#).” At the time, Ryan was a journalist at ABC News. His opening line:

“As the nation comes to grips with the worst oil disaster in its history, there is evidence BP has one of the worst safety track records of any major oil company operating in the United States.

In two separate disasters prior to the Gulf oil rig explosion, 30 BP workers have been killed, and more than 200 seriously injured.

I called Ryan, and he confirmed that, yes, he is the same guy. He wouldn’t say much more about the job change after that.

This, in itself, isn’t that remarkable. It’s certainly not unusual for a journalist to go into public relations or corporate communications. My grandfather — a writer, and probably the guy who had the most to do with my decision to do the whole media thing — started as the editor of a small newspaper in Appalachia and finished out his career working in communications for GE in New York.

But it was remarkable this week given our show’s focus on the too-close-for-comfort relationships among the media, government officials and business interests. In fact, one of the BP hires that Leibovich and Moyers discuss is [Geoff Morrell](#), the former White House correspondent for ABC, and now head of U.S. communications for BP — who also spent time in between as the press secretary for the Pentagon under both Presidents Bush and Obama.

“Sort of a classic revolving door figure, Geoff is,” Leibovich tells Moyers. Of his move to BP ([announced in Politico’s “Playbook”](#)), Leibovich writes, “Morrell’s big news illustrated the big tangle of interests that make up the D.C. self-perpetuation machine today: Old Media (ABC News), Republican administrations, Democratic administrations, corporate (BP), and New Media (Playbook) converging at the gold-plated revolving door...”

With a few [notable exceptions](#), no one journalist who goes to work for his sources — or Hill staffer who becomes a lobbyist, or Wall Street lawyer who signs on with the Securities and Exchange Commission — makes a huge difference by himself.

But the effect is cumulative.

It's something Leibovich illustrated so well in *This Town*: The more people who pass between government, private interests and the media, the more likely those entities are to be collectively captured by one another, and the more likely they are to grow apart from the rest of us.

BP America hires Geoff Morrell

Mike Allen

4-5 minutes

BP America, facing a spate of investigations and lawsuits stemming from the catastrophic Gulf oil spill, has chosen former Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell as its head of communications, signaling an aggressive new effort to recover from past communications debacles and improve its image in an essential market.

Morrell, who starts Tuesday, will remain in Washington, with frequent travel to BP headquarters in Houston and London.

The company said in an internal email: Geoff will oversee external and internal communications for BP in the United States. He will be responsible for leading our communications efforts in the US, as well as playing a critical role with our broader global communications and reputational activities. He will report directly to Peter Henshaw, Group Head of Communications, and will join Lamar McKay's BP America Leadership Team. He will work with senior leadership across the USA businesses and functions.

Morrell, 42, has worked both sides of the podium: He covered the White House for ABC News, then was Pentagon press secretary throughout the tenure of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, spanning two presidencies and consumed by two wars. BP, despite a Justice Department inquiry and increased regulatory scrutiny, has continued to pursue aggressive and creative deals, and has said it wants to set the safety standard for the industry. BP American calls itself the United States' largest producer of oil and natural gas, and is about 40 percent of BP Worldwide.

The BP email continued: "Geoff comes to BP from the Department of Defense, where he spent the past four years as Pentagon Press Secretary. In his position, Geoff served as chief spokesman for Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and the United States Military. He was appointed by President Bush in June 2007 and was asked to stay on in that position by President Obama.

"Prior to joining the US Government, Geoff was a White House correspondent for ABC News. He spent 7 years at the network and 8 years prior to that reporting for local TV stations across the country. He is a graduate of Georgetown University and received his Masters degree in Journalism from Columbia University. He will continue to reside in Washington with his wife and twin 3 year-old daughters while having a significant and regular Houston and broader US presence."

Reaction to the decision, in emails to POLITICO:

—Robert B. Barnett, partner, Williams & Connolly LLP: "Geoff was one of the most sought-after public-to-private clients that my partner, Michael O'Connor, and I have represented. He is a man of experience, skills, judgment, contacts, and good humor. He has the respect of people of all political stripes. He had options with corporations, public relations firms, lobbying firms, and could readily have started his own firm with a wide variety of clients in his stable."

—Dan Bartlett, President and CEO Hill & Knowlton US, Chairman and CEO Public Strategies, Inc.: "In hiring Geoff Morrell, BP is sending a strong signal they are stepping up their game when it comes to reputation and communications. Geoff is top notch and will serve them well."

—Lamar McKay/President & CEO of BP America: "I am thrilled to have Geoff on board. He's just what we need at this time for the company. As demonstrated at the Pentagon podium, Geoff is an energetic communicator and a strong advocate. By all accounts, behind the scenes he was a trusted advisor and key strategist. I look forward to him playing a similar role here at BP."

—Peter Henshaw/Global Head of Communications for BP: "Geoff is obviously new to the energy business, but he seemed to be a quick study at the Pentagon and I expect he will make an impact on our issues in very little time. His fresh perspective, strong work ethic and communications track record make him an excellent addition to our leadership team and I look forward to working closely with him."