

BEN RHODES GSAS '02

"It becomes a source of amusement to the right wing that I have a background in fiction writing," says Ben Rhodes—proud displayer of an MFA in creative writing diploma—with a laugh. "But the fact of the matter is, writing is writing." He's frequently pictured at Barack Obama's side, starting in 2007 as a speechwriter on the campaign trail, and postvictory as deputy national security advisor for strategic communications and speechwriting to the president. His main beats are media relations on foreign policy issues and the administration's public diplomacy overseas. In this capacity, the Manhattan native rises daily to the challenge of answering two questions, which he phrases as: "How are we communicating our policies, and then also, how are we factoring in the perceptions of our policies at home and abroad?" Rhodes took us behind the scenes of his wonderfully chaotic, anything-but-nine-to-five job.

—ELISE CZAJKOWSKI (GAL '09)

Oval Office Patio: September 2011

The president meets with Rhodes and fellow advisers

"I think the thing that surprised me about working here is that there's not a lot of people who work here [*laughs*], and so there's a huge amount of responsibility on a very small number of people. It's only a few hundred people on the White House staff, and when you think about the issues that have to be worked through here, that doesn't feel like a lot when you're coming to work every day."

Air Force One: June 2013

The president and Rhodes with fellow advisers

"I had been sleeping, and I was complaining that the president had woken me up."



Strasbourg, France: April 2009

Before a town hall meeting

"He was eating lunch, and I had to get his final sign-off on his remarks. There are always people milling around, so you have to get his attention when you can. [On the road], you learn to improvise. It's energizing because when he's travelling and he's meeting world leaders, you're making policy in motion. A lot of your most important conversations end up being in back rooms, behind a summit site, in conference rooms, or on Air Force One. That's the most challenging part of the job and also the most fun because you're right in the middle of the action."



Oval Office: January 2014

Rhodes goes over a speech concerning the NSA with the president

"It's the iconic shot of the president behind the desk. That rarely happens, but sometimes when he is in the process of editing and just has a question, he'll call you up and show you what he's working on. The irony is, that's actually more informal, [despite the fact that] the setting is very formal."



Oval Office: March 2012

Rhodes works with the president on a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee

"The president will give me a bunch of guidance before I start writing. He'll talk through an outline and about ideas he wants to see in the speech, and then I'll do a draft. I'll circulate it to his policy advisers before it goes back to him. He edits several drafts before he delivers a speech."



Air Force One: May 2012

A birthday celebration for Bloomberg journalist Julianna Goldman

"I know all the press very well—they sit in the back of Air Force One. The president doesn't often go back there, but he likes to celebrate birthdays."

White House Situation Room: March 2014

The National Security Council meets

"If you're working on foreign policy, you just don't know what the next thing is gonna be. A plane gets shot down over Ukraine and that changes everything for the next several weeks, and so you're always on call. If something goes wrong in some part of the world, the United States is expected to respond."