ROGER STONE'S RAT-EATING SWISS CHEESE DENIALS

Back when Roger Stone leaked his September testimony to HPSCI, I noted that it misrepresented the key allegations against him, meaning he never denied the important parts.

> I'm even more interested in how he depicts what he claims are the three allegations made against him.
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> > Members of this Committee have made three basic assertions against me which bust be rebutted her today. The charge that I knew in advance about, and predicted, the hacking of the Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's email, that I had advanced knowledge of the source or actual content of the WikiLeaks disclosures regarding Hillary Clinton or that, my now public exchange with a persona that our intelligence agencies claim, but cannot prove, is a Russian asset, is anything but innocuous and are entirely false.
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> In point of fact, this tripartite accusation is actually a misstatement of the allegations against him (though in his rebuttal of them, he is helped immensely by the sloppiness of public statements made by Democrats, especially those on the panel, which I've criticized myself). Generally, the accusation is more direct: that in conversing with both Julian Assange (though a cut-out) and Guccifer 2.0, Stone was facilitating or in some way

> helping the Trump campaign maximally exploit the Russian releases that were coming.

The same is true of his interview with Chuck Todd yesterday.

I'm most interested in the way Stone addresses his direct exchange with Guccifer 2.0, then restricts the rest of his denials to Wikileaks. When Todd asks Stone why he reached out to *both* Guccifer and Wikileaks, Stone focuses his attention on the former.

> Todd: Why did you reach out to Guccifer? Why did you reach out to Wikileaks?
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> Stone: First of all, my direct messages with Guccifer 2.0, if that's who it really is, come six weeks, almost six weeks after the DNC emails had been published by Wikileaks. So in order to collude in their hacking, which I had nothing whatsoever to do with, one would have needed a time machine. Secondarily, I wrote a very long piece, you can find it still at the Stone Cold Truth. I doubt that Guccifer is, indeed, a Russian operative. I also once believed that he had hacked the DNC. I don't believe that anymore either. I believe it was an inside job and the preponderance of evidence points to a load to a thumb drive or some other portable device and the device is coming out the back door. But, Chuck, ten days ago, the Washington Post that based on the Democratic minority that the Russians had sent documents to me for review. I never received any documents from the Russians or anybody representing them. I never had any contact with any
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> Todd: Did you receive any documents and you didn't know it was a Russian?
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> Stone: I never received any documents

> from anyone purporting to be a Russian or otherwise, and I never saw the Wikileaks documents in advance.

In his response he does the following:

- Raises doubts that he was actually talking to Guccifer 2.0 (even though Guccifer 2.0's only identity was virtual, so Stone's *online* interactions with any entity running the Guccifer Twitter account would by definition be communication with Guccifer 2.0)
- Repeats his earlier doubts that Guccifer 2.0 is a Russian operative
- Emphasizes that he couldn't have couldn't have been involved in any hack of the DNC Guccifer 2.0 had done because he first spoke to him six weeks after the email release (in reality, he was speaking to him three weeks after the Wikileaks release)
- Admits he once believed Guccifer 2.0 did the hack but (pointing to the Bill Binney analysis, and giving it a slightly different focus than he had in September) claims he no longer believes that
- Invents something about a

WaPo report that's not true, thereby shifting the focus to receiving documents (as opposed to, say, information)

- Denies he received documents from anyone but not that he saw documents (other than the Wikileaks ones) before they were released

This denial stops well short of explaining why he reached out to Guccifer. And it does nothing to change the record — one backed by his own writing — that Stone reached out because he believed Guccifer, whoever he might be, had hacked the DNC.

At the time Stone reached out to Guccifer (as I pointed out, he misrepresented the timing of this somewhat in his testimony), he believed Guccifer had violated the law by hacking the DNC.

He never does explain to Todd why he did reach out.

Guccifer 2.0 never comes back in the remainder of the interview. The first time Todd asks Stone if there had been "collusion" with the Russians, Stone answers it generally, insisting Trump needed no help to beat Hillary.

> Todd: You have made the case here that there was no collusion here that you're aware of. Would it have been wrong to collude with a foreign adversary to undermine Hillary Clinton's campaign?
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> Stone: Well, there's no evidence that this happened, you're asking me to answer a hypothetical question. It seems to me that Mr. Steele was colluding with the Russians.
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> Todd: Let me ask you this. Do you think

> it's fair game to get incriminating evidence from a foreign government about your political opponent?
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> Stone: But that didn't happen, Chuck, so I'm not going to answer a hypothetical question. It was unnecessary. The idea that Donald Trump needed help from the Russians to beat Hillary Clinton it's an excuse, a canard, a fairy tale. I don't believe it ever happened.

The next time — when Stone first labels then backs way the fuck off labeling conspiring with the Russians as treason — Stone then focuses on how such conspiring would only be treason if you believed that Assange was a Russian agent.

> Stone: Chuck I've been accused of being a dirty trickster. There's one trick that's not in my bag. That's treason. I have no knowledge or involvement with Russians—
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> Todd: And you believe
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> Stone: And I have no knowledge of anybody else who does.
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> Todd: Let me establish something. You believe, if unbeknownst to you, there is somebody on the Trump campaign who worked with the Russians on these email releases, that's a treasonous act?
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> Stone: No, actually, I don't think so because for it to be a treasonous act, Assange would have to be provably a Russian asset, and Wikileaks would have to be a Russian front and I do not believe that's the case.
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> Todd: Let me back you up there. You think it's possible Wikileaks and the Trump campaign coordinated the release?
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> Stone: I didn't say that at all. I have no knowledge of that and I make no such claim.

> Todd: No, I understand that. You just issued that hypothetical. So what you're saying is had that occurred you don't believe that's, you don't believe, you don't believe that that's against the law?
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> Stone: This is all based on a premise that Wikileaks is a Russian front and Assange is a Russian agent. As I said I reject that. On the other hand I have no knowledge that that happened. It's certainly did not happen in my case. That isn't something I was involved in.

When asked whether it would be illegal to work with Wikileaks (Stone's contacts with Guccifer at a time he believed Guccifer to have hacked the DNC go unmentioned) Stone again focuses on whether Wikileaks was Russian, not on the conspiracy to hack and leak documents.

This focus on Wikileaks instead of Guccifer 2.0 carries over to the statement Stone issued to ABC:

> I never received anything whatsoever from WikiLeaks regarding the source, content or timing of their disclosures regarding Hillary Clinton, the DNC or Podesta. I never received any material from them at all. I never received any material from any source that constituted the material ultimately published by WikiLeaks. I never discussed the WikiLeaks disclosures regarding Hillary Clinton or the DNC with candidate or President Donald Trump before during or after the election. I don't know what Donald Trump knew about the WikiLeaks disclosures regarding Hillary or the DNC if anything and who he learned it from if anyone.
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> No one, including Sam Nunberg is in possession If any evidence to the contrary because such evidence does not

> exist … This will be an impossible case to bring because the allegation that I knew about the WikiLeaks disclosures beyond what Assange himself had said in interviews and tweets or that I had and shared this material with anyone in the Trump campaign or anyone else is categorically false. Assange himself has said and written that I never predicted anything that he had not already stated in public.

There's very good reason Stone would want to focus on Wikileaks rather than Guccifer.

Even by his own dodgy explanation, at the time he reached out to Guccifer, he believed that Guccifer had hacked the DNC. While it's true that the public record shows Stone stopping short of accepting documents from Guccifer (all this ignores Stone's reported involvement in a Guccifer-suggested Peter Smith effort to obtain Hillary's Clinton Foundation emails), Stone's interest in coordinating with the hack-and-leak is clear.

And it seems Sam Nunberg may fear that his past testimony and communications with Stone would document that interest. If he knows Stone did have non-public communications with Guccifer, but didn't believe Guccifer to be Russian, it would also explain why Nunberg said he thought Putin was too smart to collude with Trump, but that his testimony might hurt Stone.

Adding one more point to this: early in the interview, Stone goes to some lengths to say that he proved he had actually separated from the Trump campaign by contemporaneously showing two reporters his resignation letter. This is akin to something Carter Page did in his HPSCI testimony. But given how many of those conspiring with Russia on the Trump campaign (Carter Page — especially after his departure, George Papadopoulos, and Paul Manafort) didn't have formal roles, it's not clear that letter would be definitive. Indeed, it might be the

opposite, one of a group of people who arranged plausible deniability by getting or staying off the campaign payroll.

Update: Fixed my misrepresentation of Stone’s claim about the six week delay, and fact-checked it to note it was only three weeks.