PETER SMITH HAD A PENCHANT FOR SECRECY, BUT WHENCE MIGHT BE MORE INTERESTING THAN HOW

After a long period of press disinterest in the Peter Smith operation during election year, the WSJ has an important story that describes that "investigators" are (predictably) showing intense interesting in the Republican rat-fucker's efforts, which extended to working with presumed Russian hackers, to find Hillary's deleted emails.

Before I address the headline claim of the story — about Smith's secrecy — I'd like to lay out what the story actually describes.

Way at the end of the story, it provides evidence that casts doubt on the claim Smith killed himself last year — an on the record quote from retired Wall Street financier Charles Ortel, who had been involved in the anti-Clinton effort, describing correspondence with Smith in the days before he died laying out optimistic future plans.

As regards the Clinton email effort itself, the story says that the Smith effort "remain[s] of intense interest to federal investigators working for special counsel Robert Mueller's office and on Capitol Hill," suggesting it relies on both Hill sources *and* people who know what Mueller is up to (the latter of which up to this point, has always been mediated through witnesses). In key places in the story, it conflates those two investigations, which doesn't necessarily mean witnesses making claims about Mueller's intensifying focus are wrong, but does show real sloppiness on the part of the reporting, which invites some skepticism about the significance of the conclusions offered

(including the article's focus on Mike Flynn
role in Smith's rat-fuck; click through to read
that).

> People familiar with the investigations
> described Mr. Smith's activities as an
> area of expanding interest.

The article also relies on documents, which it
describes to include emails and court records,
including:

- Court records involving
  Smith associate John
  Szobocsan's efforts to get
  Smith's estate to repay him
  for legal fees associated
  with three interviews with
  the Mueller team and an
  August grand jury appearance
  (which is pretty good
  evidence of Mueller's focus,
  though not why).
- Correspondence showing Smith
  asking associates to
  "folder," writing drafts in
  a Gmail account under the
  fake name of Robert Tyler,
  that both the associates and
  Smith had access to.
- "[A]n email in the 'Robert
  Tyler' [foldering] account
  [showing] Mr. Smith obtained
  $100,000 from at least four
  financiers as well as a
  $50,000 contribution from
  Mr. Smith himself." The
  email was dated October 11,
  2016 and has the subject

line, "Wire
Instructions—Clinton Email
Reconnaissance Initiative."
It came from someone calling
himself "ROB," describing
the funding as supporting
"the Washington Scholarship
Fund for the Russian
students." The email also
notes, "The students are
very pleased with the email
releases they have seen, and
are thrilled with their
educational advancement
opportunities." The WSJ
states that Ortel is not
among the funders named in
the email, which means they
know who the other four
funders are (if one or more
were a source for the story,
it might explain why WSJ is
not revealing that really
critical piece of news).

The WSJ really bolloxes describing the
significance of the timing of this email as
coming,

> just days after WikiLeaks and the
> website DCLeaks began releasing emails
> damaging to Mrs. Clinton's campaign and
> four days after the U.S. government
> publicly warned that Russia was
> attempting to interfere in the U.S.
> election

What it means is that it came just four days
after the Podesta emails first started coming
out, suggesting that the reference to Russian

students is actually code for happiness about the emails already being released by the Russians.

For reasons I'll return to, the suggestion Smith and his fellow rat-fuckers appear to have been using code to discuss already released emails that were neither Clinton Foundation nor deleted emails are really interesting.

With all that in mind, here are Smith's adopted methods of secrecy (beyond whatever funding methods are described in the email; Buzzfeed talked about different suspicious transactions here):

- The apparent code used by an unidentified person, which appears to show conspirators speaking about stolen emails in the guise of a student fund in DC
- Foldering — a method for which law enforcement has had effective countermeasures that have been widely publicized since the David Petraeus case, the use of which Smith committed to correspondence that got shared outside of the immediate conspirators
- A burner phone or phone number: "one phone number that he used for sensitive matters"
- Proton Mail or similar: "a commercially available encrypted email account"
- Encryption *not described to be* anything beyond typical

full disk encryption (but which could be PGP)

The code is interesting and perhaps intentionally damning. But fat lot of good either the code or the foldering does if the emails in question bear the smoking gun subject line, "Wire Instructions—Clinton Email Reconnaissance Initiative," to say nothing of the correspondence that commits to writing that they're using foldering. Indeed, *using code* in an email with an uncoded subject line is the opposite of good operational security; it serves instead as a blinking red light telling investigators where to look and that the code is code. "Bobby Three Sticks Read Me!!!"

As for the other things — basically the use of encryption and a burner that, given that it was discovered, wasn't narrowly enough executed — they show an effort to use secrecy. But not a successful effort to do so.

Further, with regards to encryption, this Politico article from last year reveals Royal O'Brien (who, except for the context, might be a candidate to be the October 11 email described by WSJ) advising Smith about PGP, which suggests any non-commercial encryption may have been adopted after key parts of the conspiracy took place.

> In an email chain from October obtained by Politico, Smith sought the advice of a tech-savvy business associate about concerns that WikiLeaks had been attacked by hackers. In the email, the associate, Royal O'Brien, a Jacksonville-based programmer Smith described as a dark web expert, advised Smith about the use of PGP keys for encryption and opined that anyone who launched an attack on WikiLeaks would likely face stiff blowback from the group's web-savvy supporters.

All of this leads me to be more interested in

where the methods adopted imperfectly by this 80 year old came from than that he did. An obvious candidate is Chuck Johnson, whose cooperation with the Smith rat-fuck is detailed in the Politico article, and whose businesses have all been shutting down in recent months, and whose defense attorney did not respond to a question from me last week about whether he still represents Johnson. Though Johnson, and his Nazi friend living in Ukraine, Weev, are better at operational security than what the WSJ describes here.

Someone got this old rat-fucker to use just enough secrecy to serve as signposts for the interesting bits.

I'm as interested in who provided that advice (and when) as I am in the identity of the four donors whom WSJ must know but isn't sharing.

As I said in July, I provided information to the FBI on issues related to the Mueller investigation, so I'm going to include disclosure statements on Mueller investigation posts from here on out. I will include the disclosure whether or not the stuff I shared with the FBI pertains to the subject of the post.