

WHY DID REBEKAH MERCER AND STEVE BANNON START PREPARING AN ACCUSATION THAT HILLARY HAD CORRUPT TIES WITH RUSSIA STARTING ON MARCH 14, 2016?

Amid a lot of noise regarding the eight month investigation into Roger Stone (including that his assistant Jason Sullivan has been asked for the complete recordings of some conference calls he gave in 2016 and that he has passed two polygraphs that may not be asking the right questions), the WaPo has a detail of real interest. Mueller brought Steve Bannon back in for questioning Friday.

On Friday, Mueller's team questioned Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's former chief campaign strategist, about alleged claims Stone made privately about WikiLeaks before the group released emails allegedly hacked by Russian operatives, according to people familiar with the session.

I say that's particularly interesting because of Bannon's role in a series of events that come as close as anything to hint that Roger Stone and Jerome Corsi not only had advance knowledge *that* Wikileaks would release John Podesta's emails, but may have known and planned for *what* those emails included.

Stone and Corsi seemed to expect that there would be Podesta emails relating to Joule

As I noted in these two posts, Stone's evolving public stories explaining his knowledge of the stolen documents seem to attempt to do three things:

- Provide non-incriminating explanations for any foreknowledge of WikiLeaks – first pointing to Randy Credico and now to James Rosen
- Offer explanations for discussions about Podesta that he may presume Mueller has that took place around August 14
- Shift the focus away from Joule and the remarkable prescience with which the right wing anticipated that WikiLeaks would be able to advance an attack first rolled out on August 1

Basically, over the course of August, several key events happened: Stone first started publicly claiming foreknowledge of what WikiLeaks would drop, tried to launch a counterattack against public reporting on Paul Manafort's sleazy ties to Russian and Russian-backed Ukrainian oligarchs, and then warned that it would soon be John Podesta's time on the barrel. Those events came amidst two separate oppo research efforts: An early one initiated by Bannon and (Clinton Cash author) Peter Schweizer

that accused Hillary of corrupt ties to Russia, largely through John Podesta's role a company called Joule Unlimited. And then a later one (starting at 39), written by Corsi, trying to impugn Hillary because her campaign manager's brother was so corrupt he had worked with Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, and at Manafort's instructions not properly declared the work. Stone seems to have wanted to conflate those two efforts, in part to suggest his August 21 tweet (and an August 15 one that may end up being just as interesting) referred to both brothers, not just John, and therefore not the earlier oppo effort.

What's interesting, however, is that while Corsi claims Stone was quite interested in the Bannon/Schweizer effort and that his own report arose out of it, Stone was virtually silent about it up until the Podesta emails started dropping in October. In fact, the day before the Podesta emails dropped, Corsi renewed the focus on Joule, which in turn teed up a Stone report and then a Corsi one integrating but not linking emails released by WikiLeaks, followed four days later by a Corsi report actually showing how those WikiLeaks emails supported claims he and especially Stone had already made. While it is true that Stone doesn't integrate evidence from the WikiLeaks emails until they were released, the analysis of those emails (Corsi's) took place days after his first report on them.

One possible scenario to explain all that (and this is all speculative) is that Roger Stone, back when he was trying to find a way to respond to stories about Manafort, asked someone with access to the files Russia either already had or planned to share with WikiLeaks, and learned there were files in the dump pertaining to the attack already launched, focused on Joule. That is, Stone may have figured out that those emails were coming in August, and therefore held his focus on Joule until they were eventually released. In this scenario, then, when Stone predicted it would soon be Podesta's time on the barrel, he may have been anticipating that the

upcoming WikiLeaks dump would substantiate an attack his cronies had already made.

We know, for example, that in September 2016 he asked Randy Credico for help learning what Clinton emails on Libya – which Stone appears to have known or believed were in Assange's hands but that had yet to be released – said. So it is consistent to assume that Stone tried to learn and plan for what was coming at other times. And his October 13 Joule attack is, as far as I'm aware, the one for which there is the most public evidence *that* he did plan the later attack.

That Joule attack was part of a report that remarkably anticipated the need to accuse Hillary of Russian ties

But all that raises another question I've been pondering: Why did Bannon and Schweizer already have an attack claiming Hillary had corrupt ties to Russia, ready to release on August 1? The timing was key: the report came out just over a week after the WikiLeaks DNC dump made the question of Russia's tampering to defeat Hillary really pressing, and just days after Trump asked Russia to go find more Hillary emails. It also came as Manafort would have had the first rumors that stories of his own Russian ties would break.

The question is all the more important given that this was not a last minute report.

Indeed, according to the footnotes, the report was started in March 2016, even before John Podesta was hacked. The Obama White House fact sheet on that Administration's attempted reset with Russia was accessed March 14, days before Podesta was hacked, and again on March 18, the day before Podesta was spearphished.

"U.S.-Russia Relations: "Reset" Fact Sheet." The White House. June 24, 2010. Accessed March 14, 2016.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/06/24/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>.

[snip]

"U.S.-Russia Relations: 'Reset' Fact Sheet." The White House. June 24, 2010. Accessed March 18, 2016.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/06/24/us-russia-relations-reset-factsheet>.

Some of the Hillary emails released by the State Department were accessed on March 28.

"Search Hillary Clinton's Emails." WSJ. March 1, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2016.
<http://graphics.wsj.com/hillary-clinton-email-documents/>.

Reports on Viktor Vekselberg Silicon Valley's initiative were accessed in March, too.

24 "Skolkovo Innovation Center." Skolkovo Innovation Center. Accessed March 24, 2016.
<http://in.rbth.com/skolkovo>.

25 "Cisco Commits \$1 Billion for Multi-year Investment in Skolkovo." ThinkRUSSIA. June 27, 2010. Accessed March 24, 2016.
<http://www.thinkrussia.com/business-economy/cisco-commits1-billion-multi-year-investment-skolkovo>.

WikiLeaks Cablegate files on the Vekselberg effort going back to 2009 were accessed on April 27 (the day after George Papadopoulos learned the Russians had emails on Hillary they wanted to dump in an effort to help Trump).

"Russia Moving Into High Gear on Nanotechnology; Actively Seeking

Cooperation with U.S.," U.S. State Department Cable. February 11, 2009. Wikileaks. Accessed April 27, 2016. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09M05COW333_a.html.

Some of the Podesta Joule work was done in April.

Podesta, John. "Public Financial Disclosure Report." Accessed April 20, 2016. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1227013/john-podesta-whitehouse-financial-disclosure-form.pdf>. "

Joule Unlimited, Inc." Portfolio Companies. Accessed April 06, 2016

There were also a string of emails that would have come from officially released State emails (but which don't include access dates; remember that most of those emails came in response to a Jason Leopold FOIA but WikiLeaks hosted them to great fanfare).

88 Mills, Cheryl D. "My List." E-mail. July 27, 2009.

89 Podesta, John. "Calling." E-mail. June 2, 2009.

90 Talbott, Strobe. "RE: Speech for Tomorrow's Meeting." E-mail. July 9, 2009.

91 Abedin, Huma. "Podesta." E-mail. August 21, 2009.

92 Podesta, John. "[redacted]." E-mail. July 25, 2009;

One of the last access dates was May 10, 2016.

Nowak, David. "Key Skolkovo Partners Microsoft, Siemens, Reiterate Commitment to Project." Skolkovo Foundation.

November 13, 2014. Accessed May 10, 2016.

Unless I missed something, there are just three finishing touches added after that date, in mid-July.

"Fact Sheet-U.S.-Russia Business Summit." Department of Commerce. June 25, 2010. Accessed July 18, 2016.
<http://2010-2014.commerce.gov/news/fact-sheets/2010/06/24/fact-sheet-us-russiabusines-summit.html>.

[snip]

"State in €70m Aids Partnership in Africa." The Irish Times. October 25, 2006. Accessed July 15, 2016.
<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/state-in-70m-aids-partnership-in-africa-1.798426>.
"Press Release: President Clinton to Visit Pediatric AIDS Clinic in Mozambique, Beginning Trip to Africa to Focus on AIDS Care." Clinton Foundation. June 17, 2005. Accessed July 15, 2016.
<https://www.clintonfoundation.org/main/news-and-media/press-releases-and-statements/pressrelease-president-clinton-to-visit-pediatric-aids-clinic-in-mozambique-beg.html>.

All of this suggests that, by May 10, 2016, the report was just sitting there at Rebekah Mercer funded Government Accountability Institute, waiting for the right opportunity to accuse Hillary of ties to Russia; virtually the entire report was done before Democrats confirmed they had been hacked by Russia, and all the research was done before WikiLeaks dumped the DNC emails.

Ms. Mercer and a person close to her had a brief conversation regarding Mrs. Clinton's deleted emails in June 2016, a month after Mr. Cruz had dropped out of the race, the person said. The person said they discussed whether it would

make sense to try to access and release those emails, but ultimately decided that looking for them would create “major legal liabilities” and would be a “terrible idea.”

Rebekah Mercer kept trying to work with WikiLeaks on optimizing emails

That Rebekah Mercer was funding this attack (one that started long before the Mercers started backing Trump) is all the more interesting given several different efforts she or her employee made to reach out to WikiLeaks. There’s Alexander Nix’s offer to help WikiLeaks organize emails we weren’t supposed to know about yet in June 2016.

Mr. Nix responded that he had reached out to Mr. Assange two months earlier—in June 2016, before Cambridge Analytica had started working for the Trump campaign—to ask him to share Clinton-related emails so the company could aid in disseminating them, the person familiar with the email exchange said. He said Mr. Assange had turned him down. That outreach and subsequent rejection was confirmed by Mr. Assange earlier this week on Twitter.

Also in June, Ms. Mercer had a discussion about accessing Hillary’s deleted emails.

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Then, again in August, Mercer asked Nix – or the GAI, the same outlet that did the Hillary Russia attack – about helping WikiLeaks with emails.

On Aug. 26, 2016, roughly a month after Mr. Trump formally became the Republican nominee, Ms. Mercer passed along to Mr. Nix an email she had received from a person she met at an event supporting Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Texas), whose presidential campaign she had initially supported during the GOP primaries, the person familiar with the exchange said. The email’s author suggested to Ms. Mercer that the Trump campaign or an allied super PAC ought to better index the WikiLeaks emails to make them more searchable, the person said.

Ms. Mercer forwarded the email to Mr. Nix, whose firm had started working for the Trump campaign in July 2016 after previously working for the Cruz campaign, according to the person. In the email, Ms. Mercer asked Mr. Nix whether the suggested organization of the emails was something Cambridge Analytica or the Government Accountability Institute—a conservative nonprofit that focuses on investigative research—could do, the person said. Ms. Mercer has sat on the board of the institute, which has received funding from her family.

Clearly, Mercer was thinking a lot about how to optimize the emails Russia had stolen.

Steve Bannon would know, at a minimum, about how he and Schweizer anticipated the need to project Russian corruption onto Hillary and her campaign manager way back in March 2016. But he also

might know whether, in the wake of the GAI report, Stone or someone else got a preview of coming attractions, other emails they might later use to return to the Joule attack.