

# THE YEAR LONG TRUMP FLUNKY EFFORT TO FREE JULIAN ASSANGE

The NYT has an unbelievable story about how Paul Manafort went to Ecuador to try to get Julian Assange turned over. I say it's unbelievable because it is 28 paragraphs long, yet it never once explains whether Assange would be turned over to the US for prosecution or for a golf retirement. Instead, the story stops short multiple times of what it implies: that Manafort was there as part of paying off Trump's part of a deal, but the effort stopped as soon as Mueller was appointed.

Within a couple of days of Mr. Manafort's final meeting in Quito, Robert S. Mueller III was appointed as the special counsel to investigate Russian interference in the 2016 election and related matters, and it quickly became clear that Mr. Manafort was a primary target. His talks with Ecuador ended without any deals.

The story itself – which given that it stopped once Mueller was appointed must be a limited hangout revealing that Manafort tried to free Assange, complete with participation from the spox that Manafort unbelievably continues to employ from his bankrupt jail cell – doesn't surprise me at all.

After all, the people involved in the election conspiracy made multiple efforts to free Assange.

WikiLeaks kicked off the effort at least by December, when they sent a DM to Don Jr suggesting Trump should make him Australian Ambassador to the US.

Hi Don. Hope you're doing well! In relation to Mr. Assange: Obama/Clinton

placed pressure on Sweden, UK and Australia (his home country) to illicitly go after Mr. Assange. It would be real easy and helpful for your dad to suggest that Australia appoint Assange ambassador to DC "That's a really smart tough guy and the most famous Australian you have!" or something similar. They won't do it, but it will send the right signals to Australia, UK + Sweden to start following the law and stop bending it to ingratiate themselves with the Clintons. 12/16/16 12:38PM

Weeks later, Hannity would go to the Embassy to interview Assange. Assange fed him the alternate view of how he obtained the DNC emails, a story that would be critical to Trump's success at putting the election year heist behind him, if it were successful. Trump and Hannity pushed the line that the hackers were not GRU, but some 400 pound guy in someone's basement.

Then the effort actually shifted to Democrats and DOJ. Starting in February through May 2017, Oleg Deripaska and Julian Assange broker Adam Waldman tried to convince Bruce Ohr or Mark Warner to bring Assange to the US, using the threat of the Vault 7 files as leverage. In February, Jim Comey told DOJ to halt that effort. But Waldman continued negotiations, offering to throw testimony from Deripaska in as well. He even used testimony from Christopher Steele as leverage.

This effort has been consistently spun by the Mark Meadows/Devin Nunes/Jim Jordan crowd – feeding right wing propagandists like John Solomon – as an attempt to obstruct a beneficial counterintelligence discussion. It's a testament to the extent to which GOP "investigations" have been an effort to spin an attempt to coerce freedom for Assange.

Shortly after this effort failed, Manafort picked it up, as laid out by the NYT. That continued until Mueller got hired.

There may have been a break (or maybe I'm missing the next step). But by the summer, Dana Rohrabacher and Chuck Johnson got in the act, with Rohrabacher going to the Embassy to learn the alternate story, which he offered to share with Trump.

Next up was Bill Binney, whom Trump started pushing Mike Pompeo to meet with, to hear Binney's alternative story.

At around the same time, WikiLeaks released the single Vault 8 file they would release, followed shortly by Assange publicly re-upping his offer to set up a whistleblower hotel in DC.



Those events contributed to a crackdown on Assange and may have led to the jailing of accused Vault 7 source Joshua Schulte.

In December, Ecuador and Russia started working on a plan to sneak Assange out of the Embassy.

A few weeks later, Roger Stone got into the act, telling Randy Credico he was close to winning Assange a pardon.

These efforts have all fizzled, and I suspect as Mueller put together more information on Trump's conspiracy with Russia, not only did the hopes of telling an alternative theory fade, but so did the possibility that a Trump pardon for Assange would look like anything other than a payoff for help getting elected. In June, the government finally got around to charging Schulte for Vault 7. But during the entire time

he was in jail, he was apparently still attempting to leak information, which the government therefore obtained on video.

Ecuador's increasing crackdown on Assange has paralleled the Schulte prosecution, with new restrictions, perhaps designed to provide the excuse to boot Assange from the Embassy, going into effect on December 1.

Don't get me wrong: if I were Assange I'd use any means I could to obtain safe passage.

Indeed, this series of negotiations – and the players involved – may be far, far more damning for those close to Trump. Sean Hannity, Oleg Deripaska, Paul Manafort, Chuck Johnson, Dana Rohrabacher, Roger Stone, and Don Jr, may all worked to find a way to free Assange, all in the wake of Assange playing a key role in getting Trump elected. And they were conducting these negotiations even as WikiLeaks was burning the CIA's hacking tools.