

ROGER STONE'S 2016 "STOP THE STEAL" EFFORT MAY HAVE BEEN COORDINATED WITH RUSSIA

CNN has traced out in detail what I've been noting for some time: the "Stop the Steal" effort ginning up disinformation and threats of violence in the wake of Donald Trump's loss is a repackaged version of an effort that Roger Stone rolled out in 2016.

[W]hile Stop the Steal may sound like a new 2020 political slogan to many, it did not emerge organically over widespread concerns about voting fraud in President Donald Trump's race against Joe Biden. It has been in the works for years.

Its origin traces to Roger Stone, a veteran Republican operative and self-described "dirty trickster" whose 40-month prison sentence for seven felonies was cut short by Trump's commutation in July.

Stone's political action committee launched a "Stop the Steal" website in 2016 to fundraise ahead of that election, asking for \$10,000 donations by saying, "If this election is close, THEY WILL STEAL IT."

But CNN – with four journalists bylined – misses several important parts of that earlier story, parts that are critical to understanding the stakes for Steve Bannon and Stone now.

Stone may have mixed his political fundraising

First, there's good reason to believe that Stone was not segregating the different kinds of campaign finance organizations he was using for his 2016 rat-fucking. Even from what remained of his public infrastructure when I wrote this post, it showed that fundraising for one kind of dark money group went to links associated with a PAC.

[I]t's clear he wasn't segregating the fundraising for them, and I wonder whether some of his email fundraising involved other possible campaign finance violations. For example, here's the Stop the Steal site as it existed on March 10, 2016. It was clearly trying to track fundraising, carefully instructing people to respond to emails if they received one. But it claimed to be TCTRAG (what I call CRAG), even though the incoming URL was for Stop the Steal.

How Much Can You Contribute?

Unlike candidate fundraising there are no limits to the amount you can contribute to the PAC.

You Can Contribute Online Through this Site

This site provides a secure method for contributing online. If you received an email with a link, please use that link. Why? Each email is part of a specific campaign and it helps us to know where your donation request came from. If not, just use the donation form here at www.ictrag.org.

You Can Mail in a Contribution Using a Check or Credit Card

To contribute via mail use our contribution form. [CLICK HERE FOR THE FORM.](#)

That remained true even after Stop the Steal was formally created, on April 10. Even after the website changed language to disavow Stop the Steal being a PAC by April 23, the fundraising form still went to TCTRAG (what I call CRAG), a PAC.

In other words, people would click a link thinking it would fund one effort (and one kind of legal entity) and any money donated would instead go to another effort (and another kind of legal entity). Since then, we've learned more

about how everyone associated with Trump – Corey Lewandowski, Paul Manafort, and Brad Parscale, in addition to Stone – set up these entities to get rich off of Trump. It's one reason the rivalry between Lewandowski and Manafort was so heated: because one's relative prominence in Trump's campaign effort was directly related to the amount of money that one could grift from it.

But as Bannon's indictment for fraud makes clear, telling people they're donating money for one purpose (to build a wall) but using the money for other purposes (to support Bannon's pricey lifestyle) can be prosecuted as fraud.

When Andrew Miller was negotiating testimony about Stone, he specifically asked for immunity relating to Stone's PACs and his texts with Stone that the government subpoenaed after his grand jury appearance overlapped with that campaign slush.

In 2016, Stone was (illegally) coordinating with the campaign

As appears to have been the case for all these efforts to grift off the campaign, Stone was coordinating his PAC and dark money efforts with the campaign.

We learned that, in Stone's case, starting with a legal debate in the lead-up to Stone's trial about 404(b) information, which is information about other bad actions (including crimes) that prosecutors are permitted to introduce during a trial to prove something like motive or consistent behavior.

In advance of Stone's trial prosecutors got permission to introduce evidence that Stone lied about something in his HPSCI testimony, on top of all the lies about who his go-between with

WikiLeaks was, only that other lie wasn't charged.

At the pretrial conference held on September 25, 2019, the Court deferred ruling on that portion of the Government's Notice of Intention to Introduce Rule 404(b) evidence [Dkt. # 140] that sought **the introduction of evidence related to another alleged false statement to the HPSCI, which, like the statement charged in Count Six, relates to the defendant's communications with the Trump campaign.** After further review of the arguments made by the parties and the relevant authorities, and considering both the fact that the defendant has stated publicly that his alleged false statements were merely accidental, and that he is charged not only with making individual false statements, but also with corruptly endeavoring to obstruct the proceedings in general, the evidence will be admitted, with an appropriate limiting instruction. See *Lavelle v. United States*, 751 F.2d 1266, 1276 (D.C. Cir. 1985), citing *United States v. DeLoach*, 654 F.2d 763 (D.C. Cir. 1980) (given the defendant's claim that she was simply confused and did not intend to deceive Congress, evidence of false testimony in other instances was relevant to her intent and passed the threshold under Rule 404(b)). The Court further finds that the probative value of the evidence is not substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice.

Judge Amy Berman Jackson permitted prosecutors to include it because it showed that Stone was trying to cover up all of his coordination with the campaign.

A September hearing about this topic made clear that it pertained to what Stone's PACs were

doing.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael J. Marando argued that Stone falsely denied communicating with Trump's campaign about his political-action-committee-related activities, and that the lie revealed his calculated plan to cover up his ties to the campaign and obstruct the committee's work.

This debate suggested prosecutors could present the information via just one witness, but unless I'm misunderstanding, it actually came in via two witnesses: There were a number of texts between Rick Gates and Stone where Stone kept demanding lists from the campaign (indeed, this is something that Stone's lawyers actually emphasized!). And during the period when Bannon was campaign manager, Stone asked him to get Rebekah Mercer to support some of his other activities, designed to suppress the black vote.

Both of these communications show that Stone was at least attempting to coordinate his efforts with the campaign (it's not clear to what degree Gates responded to Stone's demands), and the second detail shows that he was coordinating with Bannon, the guy who took over the Stop the Steal effort this year.

This kind of coordination is illegal (albeit common), though Billy Barr's DOJ refused to prosecute Trump for any of it (and he even appears to have shut down an investigation into what appeared to be a kickback system Manafort used to get paid).

Stone's Stop the Steal efforts paralleled the voter suppression efforts of the Russian

operation

Even back when I examined Stone's Stop the Steal efforts in 2018 (when I was skeptical about his legal liability with respect to WikiLeaks), it was clear that the steps Stone took happened to coincide with Russia's efforts.

Stone's voter suppression effort is not surprising. It's the kind of thing the rat-fucker has been doing his entire life.

Except it's of particular interest in 2016 because of the specific form it took. That's because two aspects of Stone's voter suppression efforts paralleled Russian efforts. For example, even as Stone was recruiting thousands of "exit pollers" to intimidate people of color, Guccifer 2.0 was promising to register as an election observer, in part because of the "holes and vulnerabilities" in the software of the machines.

INFO FROM INSIDE THE FEC: THE DEMOCRATS MAY RIG THE ELECTIONS

I'd like to warn you that the Democrats may rig the elections on November 8. This may be possible because of the software installed in the FEC networks by the large IT companies.

As I've already said, their software is of poor quality, with many holes and vulnerabilities.

I have registered in the FEC electronic system as an independent election observer; so I will monitor that the elections are held honestly.

I also call on other hackers to join me, monitor the elections from inside and inform the U.S. society about the facts of electoral fraud.

More interesting still, the GRU indictment makes it clear that GRU's information operation hackers were probing county electoral websites in swing states as late as October 28.

In or around October 2016, KOVALEV and his co-conspirators further targeted state and county offices responsible for administering the 2016 U.S. elections. For example, on or about October 28, 2016, KOVALEV and his co-conspirators visited the websites of certain counties in Georgia, Iowa, and Florida to identify vulnerabilities.

Whether or not GRU ever intended to alter the vote, Russia's propagandists were providing the digital "proof" that Republicans might point to to sustain their claims that Democrats had rigged the election.

This is a line that Wikileaks also parroted, DMing Don Jr that if Hillary won his pop should not concede.

Hi Don if your father 'loses' we think it is much more interesting if he DOES NOT concede [sic] and spends time CHALLENGING the media and other types of rigging that

occurred—as he has implied that he might do.

Since that time, we’ve learned that Maria Butina and Sergey Kislyak were also aiming to focus on observing polls in 2016. We’ve learned that the GRU hackers were actually targeting conservative Florida counties in 2016 (including Matt Gaetz’s district), meaning that had Trump lost he might have turned to the hacking of GOP strongholds to claim that that hacking had undermined his vote totals in Florida.

There are also indications that Mueller was pursuing evidence that not only Stone, but also Paul Manafort, had advance notice of all this. For example, Manafort got asked about Russians hacking voting machines in regards to a November 5, 2016 note he sent to the campaign regarding “Securing the Victory” (which admittedly is a slightly different topic but one that might have elicited an answer about hacking the Boards of Election if Manafort were at all inclined to tell the truth, which he was not).

All of which is to say that, had Hillary won narrowly (as Biden won by close margins in enough states to amount to a resounding victory), we probably would have seen Stone’s Stop the Steal effort to be doing precisely what Bannon’s Stop the Steal has been doing this year, both delegitimizing the outcome and sowing violence. But in that case, the effort may have been accompanied by possible foreknowledge that a close investigation of certain GOP strongholds would disclose proof of tampering in the election.

Stone pitched Bannon on a way to win ugly the day he became Campaign

Manager

At this point, I've come to believe that prosecutors used their live witnesses at Stone's trial (aside from former FBI Agent Michelle Taylor, who introduced most of the evidence) to make certain testimony public regarding other investigative prongs. For example, prosecutors got Gates to testify publicly that Stone claimed involvement in the release of stolen emails at a time when only Guccifer 2.0 was releasing them, not WikiLeaks. Prosecutors got Randy Credico to confirm publicly that shortly after the election, he helped Stone try to pay off his election debt by pardoning Julian Assange.

And prosecutors got Steve Bannon to – very reluctantly – repeat grand jury testimony that he regarded a pitch that Stone made to him the day after he became campaign manager to be related to dirty tricks and WikiLeaks.

Prosecutors introduced a similar exchange with Steve Bannon, the guy who took over from Manafort weeks later: an August 18, 2016 email exchange where Stone claimed Trump could “still win” ... “but it ain't pretty,” and Bannon responded by asking to talk ASAP.

From: Steve Bannon [REDACTED]
To: Roger Stone [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Congratulations
Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2016 6:14:00 AM

Let's talk ASAP

> On Aug 18, 2016, at 1:02 AM, Roger Stone [REDACTED] wrote:
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>
> Trump can still win --but time is running out.
>
> Early voting begins in six weeks.
>
> I do know how to win this but it ain't pretty.
>
> Campaign has never been good at playing the new media.
>
> Lots to do--let me know when u can talk.
>
> R

Manafort didn't testify at Stone's trial. But Bannon did. Prosecutors had Bannon sitting there on the stand, forcing him to repeat what he had said to a grand jury earlier in the year, yet they only asked him to say this much

about what all this means, in which he begrudgingly admitted he believed this discussion about using social media to win was about Wikileaks:

Q. At the bottom of this email Mr. Stone states, "Trump can still win, but time is running out. Early voting begins in six weeks. I do know how to win this, but it ain't pretty. Campaign has never been good at playing the new media. Lots to do, let me know when you can talk, R." Did I read that correctly?

A. That's correct.

Q. Then you respond, "Let's talk ASAP"; am I correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. When Mr. Stone wrote to you, "I do know how to win this but it ain't pretty," what in your mind did you understand that to mean?

A. Well, Roger is an agent provocateur, he's an expert in opposition research. He's an expert in the tougher side of politics. And when you're this far behind, you have to use every tool in the toolbox.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. Well, opposition research, dirty tricks, the types of things that campaigns use when they have got to make up some ground.

Q. Did you view that as sort of value added that Mr. Stone could add to the campaign?

A. Potentially value added, yes.

Q. Was one of the ways that Mr. Stone could add value to the campaign his relationship with WikiLeaks or Julian Assange?

A. I don't know if I thought it at the time, but he could – you know, I was led to believe that he had a relationship with WikiLeaks and Julian Assange.

Even though prosecutors didn't lay out precisely what happened next – something that other evidence suggests may have implicated Jared Kushner – Stone's team never challenged the prosecution claim that this email and the subsequent exchanges did pertain to WikiLeaks. Perhaps, because they had reviewed Bannon's grand jury and more recent testimony, they knew how he would respond and thought better off leaving it unchallenged.

Perhaps, too, they didn't want to have to explain how long this exchange persisted. For example, the Stone affidavits – starting with one obtained after Bannon's first testimony – showed this particular email exchange lasted two more days, through August 19 and 20 (the day before the Podesta "time in the barrel" tweet).

On August 19, 2016, Bannon sent Stone a text message asking if he could talk that morning. On August 20, 2016, Stone replied, "when can u talk???"

And those discussions may have continued into face-to-face meetings in September.

On September 4, 2016, Stone texted Bannon that he was in New

York City for a few more days,
and asked if Bannon was able to
talk.

[snip]

On September 7, 2016, Stone and
Bannon texted to arrange a
meeting on September 8, 2016 at
the Warner Center in New York.

On September 7, 2016, Bannon
texted Stone asking him if he
could “come by trump tower
now???”

On September 8, 2016, Stone and
Bannon texted about arranging a
meeting in New York.

This is a lot of back-and-forth to
discuss the “the tougher side of
politics.”

Even though they had Bannon there on the stand,
prosecutors did not get him to explain what this
plan to win ugly entailed. So we don’t know
whether it pertained to Stone’s efforts to
suppress the black vote, his Stop the Steal
effort to discredit a potential Hillary win, or
something more (I’ll eventually get around to
what that something more might be). But we do
know that when Bannon enthusiastically responded
to those pitches, he expected Stone’s plan to
win ugly would involve dirty tricks and
WikiLeaks.

Stone’s real go-between with WikiLeaks was likely Guccifer 2.0

No one involved with the Trump campaign – at
least as far as is public – claims to have known
who Stone’s claimed tie to WikiLeaks was.

But Rick Gates apparently did testify that Stone

claimed to have a tie to Guccifer 2.0 well before the time he was DMing with the persona on Twitter. The FBI had evidence (though how good it is remains inconclusive) that he was searching on both Guccifer 2.0 and dcleaks before those sites went live. When prosecutors wrote the Mueller Report in March 2019, they still had not determined whether any proof they had of Stone's awareness of Russia's ongoing hacking – which extended until November 2016 – was sufficient proof beyond reasonable doubt to charge him as part of the hack-and-leak conspiracy.

As I have argued, there is evidence, albeit not conclusive, that Stone's go-between with WikiLeaks was Guccifer 2.0.

If that's right, it suggests that Stone's parallel efforts with Guccifer 2.0's, efforts that seemingly anticipated hacks that might have served to discredit the vote in 2016, may not have been coincidence or even just a result of the seeming dance via which Trump's team and Russia followed the same path without any coordination. It may have reflected coordination.

Let me very clear: **I'm not making any claims that happened this year.** There's no evidence of it, and those who tracked election tampering efforts have said they found none.

But until Billy Barr intervened in Stone's sentencing, all this was (at least per FOIA redactions) an ongoing investigation, the investigation that Stone's prosecution served, in part, as an investigative step in. If you put that together with Bannon's own legal exposure in the Build the Wall fraud indictment, it changes the stakes on these men's efforts to curry Trump's favor (and to ensure he remains in power, via whatever means).

If Trump remains in charge of DOJ, these men will stay out of prison. If he doesn't, they may not. And for Stone, especially, a Joe Biden DOJ (or a Democratic Congress, with DOJ's help) may

reveal what he has been denying for years, that Stone willingly coordinated during the 2016 election with someone whose ties to Russia were only thinly hidden.