

The Roger Stone indictment shows a conspiratorial comedy of Opsec errors



Enlarge / Roger Stone, a former advisor to President Donald Trump, leaves the Fort Lauderdale Federal Courthouse on January 25, 2019. Stone was charged by the government of obstruction, giving false statements and witness tampering. Johnny Louis/Getty Images

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Former Trump advisor and self-proclaimed “dirty trickster”

Roger Stone—the man with a Richard Nixon tattoo on his back and a penchant for playing the evil genius—was arrested early on January 25 by a swarm of tactically equipped (and unpaid) FBI agents. The charges against him, in an indictment handed down by a federal grand jury convened by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, include witness tampering, obstruction of a Congressional investigation, and six counts of making false statements to Congress.

Stone had previously played up his connections with WikiLeaks' Julian Assange repeatedly. The advisor allegedly concealed the nature of those communications with WikiLeaks, lied about who acted as his intermediary, and made *Godfather II* references in his messages urging radio host Randy Credico—one of his go-betweens to Assange—not to contradict details of his testimony.

The evidence listed against him in the indictment includes emails, text messages, and other communications—communications that contradict Stone's contention to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) that all his communications were over the phone and with only one individual. This evidence also shows Stone attempting to cajole and intimidate Randy Credico by threatening to take away his therapy dog and have his lawyers "rip you to shreds." At one point, Stone allegedly even texted Credico, "Prepare to die [expletive]."

And despite this mounting evidence, Stone might have gotten away with much of this had he been a bit more keen about operational security. He believed that WhatsApp, which he used as a "secure" phone line and for messaging, would protect his communications from the eyes of investigators—forgetting that the people he was talking to could just show the messages to Mueller's team and a grand jury. He also left an email trail of his alleged misdeeds seemingly spanning a mile wide.

The Stone indictment also states that a "high-ranking" Trump

campaign official directed the advisor to get in touch with WikiLeaks about damaging Clinton emails. Somehow, that's a mere aside in the indictment's description of Stone's self-paved highway to arraignment.

“Friend in embassy”

The first stages of Stone's involvement with WikiLeaks as described in the indictment have been confirmed by Jerome Corsi, who was interviewed by the Special Counsel Investigation team in September 2018 and is referred to as Person 1 throughout the document. Corsi handed over his cell phone and emails to investigators.

After WikiLeaks released emails stolen from the Democratic National Committee on July 22, 2016, “a senior Trump Campaign official was directed to contact Stone about any additional releases and what other damaging information [WikiLeaks] had regarding the Clinton Campaign,” the indictment states. In turn, Stone reached out to multiple associates in an effort to communicate with WikiLeaks and Julian Assange and obtain further Clinton-related emails. On July 25, 2016, Stone emailed Corsi. The subject line was “Get to Julian Assange,” and the message read, “Get to [Julian Assange] at Ecuadorian Embassy in London and get the pending WikiLeaks emails . . . they deal with Foundation, allegedly.”

Corsi soon turned to a Trump supporter in the UK for assistance to act as a go-between to WikiLeaks. On August 2, 2016, Corsi emailed Stone, “Word is friend in embassy plans 2 more dumps. One shortly after I'm back. 2nd in Oct. Impact planned to be very damaging...Time to let more than [the Clinton Campaign chairman] to be exposed as in bed w/ enemy if they are not ready to drop HRC. That appears to be the game hackers are now about. Would not hurt to start suggesting HRC old, memory bad, has stroke – neither he nor she well. I expect that much of next dump focus, setting stage for Foundation

debacle.”

Stone took the message and ran with it. Six days later, Stone said at a public event, “I actually have communicated with Julian Assange. I believe the next tranche of his documents pertain to the Clinton Foundation, but there’s no telling what the October surprise may be.” He continued to claim exclusive insight into future WikiLeaks drops—despite, of course, having no direct communication with Assange or WikiLeaks.

“Off the record”

That doesn’t mean Stone wasn’t trying. On August 19, 2016, Credico texted him to say, “I’m going to have Julian Assange on my show next Thursday.” Assange was on Credico’s radio show on August 25, 2016; the next day, Credico texted Stone, “Assange talk[ed] about you last night.” When Stone asked what Assange said, Credico replied, “He didn’t say anything bad we were talking about how the Press is trying to make it look like you and he are in cahoots.” One day later, Credico texted that he was “in charge” of a project to create an Assange radio show. He texted later, “Assange has kryptonite on Hillary.”

Stone next turned to Credico as a channel to Assange, asking him by text message to deliver a request to Assange at the Ecuadorian Embassy. Credico assented, adding in a follow-up message, “Just remember do not name me as your connection to Assange...you had one before that you referred to.” Stone emailed Credico an article with a list of allegations about Hillary Clinton’s activities as Secretary of State and asked the radio host, “Please ask Assange for any State or HRC email from August 10 to August 30—particularly on August 20, 2011 that mention [the subject of the article] or confirm this narrative.” Credico forwarded the request to “a friend who was an attorney with the ability to contact” Assange, the indictment states, BCC’ing that email to Stone. Credico then

sent a photograph of himself standing outside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

On October 1, Credico sent Stone a message in advance of an anticipated press conference by Assange: “big news Wednesday . . . now pretend u don’t know me . . . Hillary’s campaign will die this week.” This began a string of messages over Assange’s cancellation of that press conference, which was eventually held October 4—without any Clinton bombshells.

Credico texted Stone on October 2, “Off the Record Hillary and her people are doing a full-court press they [sic] keep Assange from making the next dump . . . That’s all I can tell you on this line . . . Please leave my name out of it.”

But Stone kept pumping up the dump with people in the Trump camp, based on the indictment’s timeline. He told a supporter within the Trump campaign on October 3, “Spoke to my friend in London last night. The payload is still coming.” And when the news conference passed without new Clinton dirt, Stone got an email from the unnamed high-ranking Trump Campaign official asking what was up. According to the indictment, Stone answered that “the head of [WikiLeaks] had a ‘[s]erious security concern’ but that [WikiLeaks] would release ‘a load every week going forward.’”

On October 4, Stone’s supporter with the Trump campaign texted to ask, “hear anymore from London?” Stone answered, “Yes – want to talk on a secure line – got Whatsapp?” In the conversation that followed, Stone said more damaging emails would drop soon.

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