

# UNWINDING A MULTITHREADED BEAST

This is more than the usual caveat asking readers to note the byline on this post. I'm not the expert at this site on the investigations by Special Counsel's Office or any other law enforcement body – for that see Marcy's or bmaz's posts and comments.

However I spend a lot of time on information technology, which is how I ended up reading a report on internet-mediated information warfare.

Last year the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence held a hearing about Foreign Influence on Social Media. One of the commissioned and invited research organizations was New Knowledge (NK), a cybersecurity/information integrity consultancy. NK's director of research delivered prepared remarks and a whitepaper providing an overview of Russia's influence operations and information warfare program.

The paper is a peppy read; it will little surprise those who have followed the Trump-Russia investigation and the role social media played in the 2016 election. But there are still bits which are intriguing – more so months after the paper was first delivered, in light of long-time ratfucker Roger Stone's indictment this past week.

Note these two excerpts from the report:

• **Operations Targeting Prominent Figures**

- IRA operations targeted a wide range of Republican leaders, including Sens. Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Lindsay Graham, John McCain, and Dr. Ben Carson.
- There were significant IRA mentions that aimed to increase or erode support for

KEY TAKEAWAYS

prominent political figures, including Julian Assange, Robert Mueller, and James Comey. These mentions were largely an attempt to shape audience perception during a relevant news cycle.

- Given the recent news regarding a pending indictment of Mr. Assange, it is perhaps notable that there were a number of posts expressing support for Assange and Wikileaks, including several on October 4th, 2016, the day before Roger Stone's text message history indicated Mr. Stone believed hacked email data would be made public via Wikileaks.
- These tactics and goals overlapped with the pro-Trump portion of the operation.

A sub-thread of note was the dozens of posts extolling the virtues of Wikileaks and Julian Assange that the IRA placed across Black, Left, and Right-leaning audiences on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The Instagram accounts and Facebook pages produced memes teasing new Wikileaks drops (such as via IRA account @therepublicandaily, which positioned itself as a Republican news source) and reinforcing Assange's reputation as a whistleblower with a commitment to journalistic freedom. The Twitter accounts joined in as well. There were a small number of Facebook and Instagram posts about Assange, reinforcing his reputation as a freedom fighter, on October 4th, 2016 – a few days before the major Podesta email dump occurred. Given the GRU involvement in the DNC hack with Wikileaks, it is possible that the IRA was tasked with socializing Wikileaks to both Right and Left audiences. Prior to October 4th, the last post about Assange had been in early September 2016. Once the emails were released, there were many more tweets and Facebook posts about them.

There wasn't a link in the indictment last year of the Russian Internet Research Agency personnel with Stone's indictment. The IRA charges don't overlap with Stone's at all (count numbers from indictments in paren.).

**Stone:**

- (1) Obstruction of Proceeding
- (2-6) False Statements
- (7) Witness Tampering

**IRA:**

- (1) Conspiracy (to gain unauthorized access, hack and steal information)
- (1) Wire Fraud Conspiracy
- (3-7) Wire Fraud
- (8,9) Aggravated Identity Theft
- (10) Conspiracy Commit to Money Laundering

But Stone's indictment reveals an interesting overlap of threads between Stone's efforts on behalf of the Trump campaign and the information warfare operation the IRA conducted in 2016.

- f. On or about October 1, 2016, which was a Saturday, Person 2 sent STONE text messages that stated, "big news Wednesday . . . now pretend u don't know me . . . Hillary's campaign will die this week." In the days preceding these messages, the press had reported that the head of Organization 1 planned to make a public announcement on or about Tuesday, October 4, 2016, which was reported to be the ten-year anniversary of the founding of Organization 1.
- c. On or about October 4, 2016, the head of Organization 1 held a press conference but did not release any new materials pertaining to the Clinton Campaign. Shortly afterwards, STONE received an email from the high-ranking Trump Campaign official asking about the status of future releases by Organization 1. STONE answered that the head of Organization 1 had a "[s]erious security concern" but that Organization 1 would release "a load every week going forward."
- d. Later that day, on or about October 4, 2016, the supporter involved with the Trump Campaign asked STONE via text message if he had "hear[d] anymore from London." STONE replied, "Yes - want to talk on a secure line - got Whatsapp?" STONE subsequently told the supporter that more material would be released and that it would be damaging to the Clinton Campaign.
17. On or about October 7, 2016, Organization 1 released the first set of emails stolen from the Clinton Campaign chairman. Shortly after Organization 1's release, an associate of the high-ranking Trump Campaign official sent a text message to STONE that read "well done." In subsequent conversations with senior Trump Campaign officials, STONE claimed credit for having correctly predicted the October 7, 2016 release. **Organization 1 - Wikileaks**

Why was the IRA propelling content to fluff Assange's credibility in the days before the release of the hacked emails Stone was trying to manage? This is a rather odd service to offer as a tenth anniversary gift to a so-called journalism outlet which should be able to point to its achievements on its own.

The IRA wasn't alone in its Assange cred-fluffing. What a coincidence the UK tabloid DailyMail also touted Assange's ability to affect Clinton's campaign with a release of hacked emails – and at nearly the same time the IRA was pumping up Assange's image.

### **Assange keeps Hillary hanging: Wikileaks boss says he WON'T publish his stash of 1million secret documents today - but he promises they'll be out before the election**

- Julian Assange claimed he was not plotting to bring down Hillary Clinton
- Wikileaks claims it has 10million further documents it is going to publish
- More top secret documents are expected to be published later this week
- He is planning to release large caches of documents until November's poll
- However, he mocked claims he would release new secrets today as he spoke at event to celebrate website's 10th anniversary

How odd this DailyMail piece was pegged to Wikileaks' anniversary, but the headline on the article and subhead treat the anniversary as an afterthought compared to the hacked emails and their effect on the Clinton campaign.

It doesn't look like social media alone manipulated public perception, or that manipulation was confined to U.S. media.

Perhaps these two threads – the IRA's influence operation/information warfare and Stone's hacked email ratfucking – weren't directed by a common entity. The public may not know depending on the course of SCO's criminal and counterintelligence investigations and what information is released. But they certainly sewed toward the same outcome.