

Long-time Trump adviser Roger Stone arrested in Mueller probe

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Former Trump political adviser and long-time crony Roger Stone was arrested Friday morning on an indictment brought by Justice Department special counsel Robert Mueller, who heads the investigation into alleged Russian “meddling” in the 2016 elections.

The arrest was carried out in an extraordinarily heavy-handed fashion, more befitting a drug kingpin or a serial killer than a 66-year-old political operative who regularly appears on Fox News and other networks to defend Trump and was hardly a risk either for flight or violent resistance.

Unlike many others targeted by the Mueller investigation, Stone was not given notice of his indictment in advance or allowed to surrender himself to a court with his lawyer present.

More than two dozen heavily armed, flak-jacketed FBI agents demanded entry to Stone’s Fort Lauderdale home before dawn, pushing their way in and arresting him in his bedclothes. The agents were accompanied by a CNN camera crew, effectively acting as “embedded journalists” in a military operation, to record the scene.

Stone was charged with seven counts, all related to speech—five counts of making false statements to Congress, one of obstructing an official proceeding (through his testimony) and one for witness tampering (urging another witness not to testify).

Despite media coverage which has portrayed him as a key link in the alleged Russian conspiracy to elect Trump, he was not charged with any actions, with any contact with a Russian government agent, or with handling emails stolen from the computers of the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta.

In fact, the 24-page indictment barely refers to Russia at all, dealing almost entirely with Stone’s testimony in May and September 2017 before the House Intelligence

Committee about his efforts to learn what material WikiLeaks had accumulated that could be detrimental to the Hillary Clinton campaign, and what the group’s publishing plans were.

WikiLeaks is not explicitly named in the indictment, which refers to it always as “Organization 1,” but there is no doubt of its being targeted by the Mueller investigation. The indictment refers at one point to the organization’s leader “living in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London,” clearly meaning Julian Assange, who sought asylum in 2012 and has become a de facto prisoner there.

New York comedian and radio host Randy Credico, who had interviewed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy, was identified by Stone as an intermediary between himself and WikiLeaks. Press accounts identified Credico as the witness whom Stone allegedly sought to tamper with, although he is described only as Person 2 in the indictment.

None of the actions allegedly taken by Stone are criminal. He made efforts, through intermediaries, to contact WikiLeaks and Assange, and to find out what material they had and what they intended to do with it. He told unnamed Trump campaign officials about these efforts, and they encouraged him to proceed.

Nor is Stone charged with conspiracy, either with supposed Russian agents, or with WikiLeaks, which, according to the smear campaign mounted by the Democratic Party and the military-intelligence apparatus, was the recipient of documents hacked from the Democrats by Russian cyberwarfare operatives.

Mueller has indicted several dozen alleged Russian operatives, but since they are in Russia and cannot be arrested or the allegations and evidence tested, the indictments serve mainly to provide political cover for

the investigation.

The “crimes” with which Stone is charged relate to his statements about his efforts in support of Trump, made to the House committee. The scale of the alleged lies is rather minimal, including claiming that he had communicated with Credico only in person and by phone, when he had actually exchanged numerous text messages and emails as well.

Stone pled not guilty to all the charges and was released on surety bond, meaning that the court demanded no payment up front, because he was not deemed a flight risk. He spoke to the media outside the courtroom, proclaiming his innocence and declaring that he would not testify against Trump because neither he nor the president had done anything wrong.

Stone’s lawyer Grant Smith called the charges “ridiculous,” adding, “This is all about a minor charge about lying to Congress about something that was apparently found later.”

In a subsequent interview Friday night on Fox News, Stone said it was “disconcerting” that CNN “was aware that I would be arrested before my lawyers were informed.”

He continued: “I had no firearm in the house. I don’t have a permit for a firearm. I don’t own a firearm. Only my wife, my two dogs, my three cats were at home. I’m not a flight risk, in fact I think my passport has expired or it will expire in a few days. I have no record of criminal past. And frankly, they just could have contacted my attorney and I would have voluntarily turned myself in.”



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