

Who was who in Trump's Willard Hotel “war room”?

Jacob Crosse
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On Saturday, two days after the House of Representatives cited Trump's coup co-conspirator Stephen Bannon for criminal contempt, the *Washington Post* published a lengthy article summarizing the efforts of Republican operatives operating out of the Willard Hotel to organize the overthrow of the presidential election.

Trump set up a “command center” at the Willard Intercontinental Hotel, located less than a block from the White House, where Bannon, along with fellow fascists such as Rudy Giuliani, plotted with Republican federal and state lawmakers, ex-Trump officials and far-right militia leaders in a conspiracy that culminated in the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021.

The *Post* article establishes that rooms at the Willard were rented out to lawyers hired by the Trump campaign who were receiving their marching orders directly from the White House. The rooms, paid for by the Trump campaign, were obtained on November 5, two days after Democrat Joe Biden defeated Trump by a substantial margin in both the popular and the electoral votes.

The Willard Hotel cabal underlines the fact that the attack on January 6 was not, as Trump and most Republican officials claim, a “political protest” that got out of hand but rather the result of months of subversion headed up by Trump.

It must also be noted that the Willard “command center” was just one extension of the White House coup plot. A second “war room” was also established at the Trump International Hotel in Washington D.C. Several people have been identified as having participated in both.

For example, Trump's former National Security Advisor, retired Army General Michael Flynn and Trump political fixer and confidant Roger Stone were photographed in the days leading up to the coup attempt at both hotels.

Independent journalist, attorney, former criminal investigator and founder of the *Proof* substack Seth Abramson, citing Willard Hotel participant Joe Oltmann, has estimated that around “25–30” people participated in the Willard operation. Oltmann is the founder of FEC United (Faith, Education, Commerce United), a reactionary Colorado group, which Abramson writes is “closely linked to the United American Defense Force (UADF), a far-right militia.”

That the White House was the nerve center of a political conspiracy to establish a dictatorship was known well before January 6. In a Perspective column in the October 1, 2020 edition of the WSWS, headlined “Trump's Operation Dictatorship: What the debate exposed,” Joseph Kishore and David North spelled out Trump's political strategy, involving the use of “fabricated allegations of ballot fraud to incite fascist thugs, assisted by police and unidentified federal agents.”

Similarly, in an October 9, 2020 perspective column headlined, “The Michigan conspiracy, Trump, and the 2020 election,” Eric London wrote:

Trump's plan for election day is no longer a matter of

conjecture. In battleground states that support Biden, Trump will falsely proclaim himself the victim of election fraud, deploy violent groups to intimidate voters, seize statehouses and eliminate political opponents. Armed supporters will declare the vote invalid or compel state legislatures to certify pro-Trump slates of electors.

What follows is a partial list of people who have now been confirmed through the October 23 article in the *Washington Post* and prior reporting to have participated in Trump's “command center” at the Willard.

• John Eastman

Eastman is a former law professor and dean at the Chapman University School of Law, located in wealthy Orange County, California. He was a law clerk to arch-reactionary Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and is the founding director of the Center for Constitutional Jurisprudence, a law firm affiliated with the far-right Claremont Institute, of which Eastman is a senior fellow.

The Claremont Institute was founded in 1979 and has provided fellowships to far-right personalities, such as Fox News's Laura Ingraham and Jack Posobiec, a current Turning Point USA employee and former correspondent for the One America News Network.

Eastman was one of the speakers at the “Save America” rally headed by Trump outside the White House on the morning of January 6. He was the author of a memo to Vice President Mike Pence outlining Pence's supposed constitutional power, while presiding over the January 6 joint session of Congress called to officially count the Electoral College vote results, to override the vote as certified by state officials. In reality, Pence had no such power under the Constitution or statute.

The memo was outlined in the recent book *Peril* by *Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa. In it, Eastman argued that Pence could unilaterally defer counting electors from several battleground states that Trump lost—such as Georgia, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Arizona and Michigan—on the basis of unsubstantiated claims of widespread “irregularities” and “fraudulent” ballots.

Eastman claimed that Pence could then declare Trump the winner. If the Democrats objected, the election would be thrown into the U.S. House, where the outcome would be decided by the votes of state delegations, not individual representatives, and since the Republicans controlled a bare majority, 26, of the state delegations, Trump would be reelected.

In addition to drafting Trump's so-called “coup memo,” Eastman represented Trump in the December 9, 2020 lawsuit, *Texas vs Pennsylvania*, which was filed by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in a bid to override the will of the voters in at least four states. The U.S. Supreme Court threw out the suit.

The *Post* report notes that Eastman stayed at the Willard from “Jan. 4 until after breakfast on Jan. 8,” citing records showing that “the hotel charged \$1,407 for his lodging and meals during that time.”

Eastman's arrival at the Willard “came on the same day that Trump

convened an Oval Office meeting to discuss replacing then-acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen with Jeffrey Clark, a Justice Department official friendly with Eastman who proposed that the department encourage investigation of Trump's election fraud claims in Georgia and other states," the *Post* writes.

• **Rudolph Giuliani**

Giuliani is the former mayor of New York City and a former US attorney for the Southern District of New York. As Trump's personal lawyer, Giuliani oversaw the legal team charged with overturning the election.

After Trump announced on November 14 that he would be challenging the election results in court, Giuliani was tasked with creating a team of lawyers. In a November 19 press conference, Giuliani announced the team, which included Victoria Toensing, Sidney Powell, Jenna Ellis and Joseph diGenova. Less than three weeks after joining Giuliani's team, diGenova appeared on a far-right Newsmax podcast and called for the former director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Chris Krebs, to be "drawn and quartered, taken out at dawn and shot" for stating that the 2020 election was free of manipulation.

In the meantime, Giuliani and Ellis were pressuring Republican state lawmakers to unilaterally overturn the results in their states. Previous reporting has established that they met with the Pennsylvania Senate Majority Policy Committee on November 25, during which Ellis urged Pennsylvania lawmakers to fix a "corrupted, irredeemably compromised election," either by arranging for a new, "special election" or directing "the manner of your electors."

Similar appeals were made by Ellis and Giuliani to Arizona lawmakers on November 30, Michigan lawmakers on December 2 and Georgia representatives on December 4.

The *Post* report states that on January 2, 2021 Trump, Giuliani and Eastman spoke to 300 state legislators on a conference call to provide "evidence of fraud" and galvanize the lawmakers to "decertify" the election results. "You have the real power," Trump told the lawmakers, according to a report in the *Washington Examiner*. "You're the ones that are going to make the decision."

• **Bernard Kerik**

Kerik is the former New York police commissioner under Giuliani and his longtime political crony. Long rumored to be tied to organized crime, he was the driver and bodyguard for Giuliani during his campaign for mayor of New York City in 1993. On December 3, 2004, Kerik was nominated by former President George W. Bush to head the Department of Homeland Security but was forced to withdraw after allegations of corruption emerged. Bernard Kerik was subsequently convicted of tax fraud and perjury and was pardoned by Trump in February 2020.

Speaking to the *Post*, Kerik said he and Giuliani worked together in furtherance of Trump's attempt to overturn the election from November 2020 through January 19, 2021. "I believed until Inauguration Day that something could be done—that's why the fight was still going on," Kerik told the *Post*. "There were a lot of people who thought on the 6th that it was over, but I didn't believe that because the evidence seemed so overwhelming to me."

Kerik told the *Post* that he and Giuliani moved to Washington D.C. in early November but decided to move closer to the White House and stay at the Willard Hotel the third week of December. The *Post* notes: "While the lawyers at the Willard were focused on promoting the legal strategy Eastman outlined, Kerik helped head up efforts to sift through allegations of election fraud. Phil Waldron, a retired Army colonel who specialized in psychological operations, led a team of people who provided Kerik with analyses of state data, which purported to show fraudulent voting, according to two of the people familiar with activities at the Willard."

Kerik billed the Trump campaign for \$66,371.54 in travel and other expenses, including \$55,295 for rooms for legal team members at the

Willard from December 18 through January 8. The legal team members referenced in the documents include Kerik, Giuliani and Eastman.

• **Boris Epshteyn**

Epshteyn is a Russian American Republican political operative who emigrated to the United States in 1993 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Epshteyn graduated from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in 2004. In 2008, he served as a communications aide in the McCain-Palin presidential campaign. In 2016, Epshteyn joined the Trump campaign as a media surrogate.

After Trump's 2016 victory, Epshteyn served for three months as a special assistant in the Trump administration. He is credited with writing Trump's January 2017 Holocaust Remembrance Day statement, which failed to mention the Jewish people. After leaving the Trump administration in March 2017, Epshteyn was hired by media conglomerate Sinclair Broadcast Group as its senior political analyst.

Epshteyn was the strategic advisor and co-chair of the Jewish Voice for Trump's Advisory Board during Trump's 2020 reelection campaign. As a surrogate for Trump, Epshteyn was and continues to be a frequent guest on the fascistic "War Room" podcast hosted by Stephen Bannon.

In an interview with the *Post*, Epshteyn repeated Trump's election lies, stating he "firmly believed then, as I believe now, that the vice president—as president of the Senate—had the constitutional power to send the issue back to the states for 10 days to investigate the widespread fraud and report back well in advance of Inauguration Day, January 20."

• **Russell J. Ramsland Jr.**

Ramsland is co-owner of Allied Security Operations Group, a cybersecurity outfit he has used to push election fraud conspiracy theories, going back to 2018. In a November 17, 2020 taping of *Lou Dobbs Tonight* on Fox News, Ramsland was the invited call-in guest. During his five-minute appearance, he falsely claimed that there was a "stunning amount of fraud in this election" and that "over 3,000 precincts" in Michigan had inaccurate vote counts in favor of Biden. He also propagated conspiracies surrounding Dominion Voting Systems. Ramsland ran for Congress in 2016, falling in the Republican primary to Pete Sessions. Sessions was one of 147 House Republicans who voted to overturn the election results after the attack on the Capitol.

• **Christina Bobb**

Bobb is currently a host and reporter on the fascistic One America News Network. She is a lawyer by trade and has worked for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as an executive secretary. Prior to working for the DHS, she was a judge advocate in the United States Marine Corps. During her time on active duty, she was an attorney in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, where, according to her One American News Network (OANN) bio, she assisted "the Command in all legal matters relating to operations and intelligence."

Her OANN bio also notes that she "mobilized to Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa in Stuttgart, Germany as an operations officer. In this role, she was responsible for briefing the senior leadership on current operations in both Europe and Africa on a daily basis."

In the months leading up to the coup, Bobb repeated Trump's election lies and has continued to fundraise and support efforts to "audit" the votes in states Trump lost.

• **Philip Luelsdorff**

Luelsdorff is the director of Business Development for 1st Amendment Praetorian (1AP), a fascist paramilitary security group that has provided "security" for far-right politicians and fascist rallies, including a QAnon convention this past May in Dallas. The online group @Capitolhunters, which has curated and organized crowd-sourced information regarding the January 6 coup, reported that Luelsdorff's mother, Baroness von Luelsdorff, claims to be an exiled Russian aristocrat.

The co-founder of the paramilitary group is former US Army Green Beret Robert Patrick Lewis. Lewis has previously served as bodyguard for

Trump-aligned figures and has been named by the Select Committee investigating the attack on the Capitol. Lewis was deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, and in an October 11, 2020 Facebook post he described the IAP as a “group of military, law enforcement and intelligence community veterans,” who “provide pro bono intelligence and security services to patriotic and religious events.”

IAP provided “security” at several of the rallies leading up to the January 6 attack. On the event permit listed for the November 14 Million MAGA March at Freedom Plaza, which was obtained by Cindy Chafian on behalf of Women for America First, the permit notes that IAP members would be wearing black T-shirts and serve as “demonstration marshals.” At 2:18 p.m. on January 6, 2021 Lewis’s official Twitter account tweeted: “Today is the day the true battles begin.”



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