

Top Trump officials at Department of Defense erased text messages following January 6 coup

Jacob Crosse, Patrick Martin
3 August 2022

On Tuesday, CNN reported that top officials at the Department of Defense (DoD) and the US Army “wiped” text messages on their government issued phones following requests from Congressional committees and oversight groups to preserve records following Donald Trump’s failed coup on January 6, 2021.

DoD officials whose records were deleted include former Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, his Chief of Staff Kash Patel and General Counsel Paul Ney. Army officials whose records were “wiped” include former Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy, Chief of Staff General James McConville, General Counsel James E. McPherson and Director of Army Staff Lt. General Walter Piatt.

American Oversight, a government watchdog group, filed multiple Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for records of top Trump officials on January 12, 2021. After not receiving a reply, in March 2021 the group sued the agencies for the records and did not receive a reply until January 2022.

In a letter sent to Attorney General Merrick Garland requesting he investigate the destruction of the records, American Oversight wrote that the DoD and the Army admitted to it in court documents filed on March 10, 2022, roughly three months before the US House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack held its first of eight summer hearings, that the “text messages were not preserved and therefore could not be searched.”

The letter revealed that “opposing counsel” confirmed to American Oversight that Ney’s phone was wiped on January 20, 2021, while Patel’s records were deleted on January 22, 2021, and Miller’s on February 2, 2021. These deletions occurred after American Oversight had filed its FOIA requests.

American Oversight was not able to confirm the exact date that McCarthy and McPherson wiped their phones, although that too was after American Oversight had made

its FOIA requests.

In an attempt to characterize this blatant destruction of not only government records, but certainly criminal evidence, as just a standard bureaucratic operation, government lawyers justifying the erasure of the texts wrote to American Oversight on March 10, 2022: “[W]hen an employee separates from DoD or Army he or she turns in the government-issued phone, and the phone is wiped. For custodians no longer with the agency, the text messages were not preserved and therefore could not be searched.”

This flimsy excuse mirrors other dubious explanations proffered by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General Joseph Cuffari concerning Trump-aligned elements within the capitalist state deleting incriminating messages. Last week the *Washington Post* revealed that text messages sent on government phones by former top DHS officials including acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf and his acting Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli had gone “missing.”

Despite several pending requests from congressional committees and oversight groups, Cuffari neglected to inform the Select Committee that the texts from the DHS heads had gone “missing” until five months later.

The revelation of deleted records at DHS followed a July 13, 2022 letter Cuffari sent to the Senate and House Committees on Homeland Security revealing that text messages sent by dozens of Secret Service agents on January 5 and January 6, 2021 had been erased after an alleged error during “data migration.”

As with the DoD and the DHS, Secret Service agents deleted their texts despite the fact that multiple congressional committees had requested the records prior to the alleged “data migration” that was blamed for the missing records. This pathetic excuse ignores the fact that agents had received specific instructions on how to retain data prior to being issued new phones at the end of

January 2021.

The destruction of government records was not limited to the DHS, the Secret Service, the DoD and the Army. This past March it was revealed that the official White House phone logs had also been modified to conceal who exactly the aspiring dictator Trump was talking to during the attack on the Capitol. The logs omit nearly eight hours of phone calls, beginning at 11:17 a.m. and extending through 6:54 p.m on January 6.

Seth Abramson, author of the Proof Substack blog, a lawyer, criminal investigator, *Newsweek* columnist and professor of journalism at the University of New Hampshire, tweeted on August 2 that the deletion of “critical evidence... continues to look like—at DHS, the Secret Service, and DoD—the biggest cover-up in American History.”

That none of these agencies has been able to present text messages to Congress over 18 months since the attack on the Capitol—and that this has not been made a major issue in the January 6 hearings or by the Department of Justice—confirms that the Biden administration and Democratic Party have been engaged in a cover-up of the role of the Pentagon, the Secret Service and other federal agencies in Trump’s coup plot.

Christopher Miller was the senior Pentagon official at the time of the coup. McCarthy was, by law, in charge of the D.C. National Guard, whose commander was requesting permission to send troops to the Capitol to drive off the mob of fascists. Patel was the principal link between them and the White House, and had been appointed Miller’s aide for that reason.

It is extremely significant that text messages from top Army officials McConville, McCarthy and Piatt were deleted. It was reported last year first by the *Washington Post*, and then substantiated in congressional testimony by former D.C. National Guard Commander William Walker and his subordinate, Colonel Earl Matthews, that Piatt, McCarthy and General Charles Flynn, brother of retired general and fascist Trump ally Michael Flynn, were on the initial phone call with Walker, Matthews, D.C. Metropolitan Police Chief Robert Contee III and Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund.

The two police officials pleaded for military reinforcements as the Capitol was being overrun by Trump’s paramilitaries. Walker had urgently requested authorization to deploy National Guard troops on standby to defend Congress from the mob.

Walker, Sund and Contee have all claimed in testimony before Congress that the military denied their urgent

requests for reinforcements. All three men testified that Piatt and Flynn said they did not like the “optics” of deploying uniformed soldiers to the Capitol.

For roughly 3 hours and 19 minutes, Walker’s request to deploy a “quick reaction force” consisting of 155 soldiers was delayed. Normally, Walker would have been able to deploy his troops to defend the Capitol on his own authority plus a pro-forma OK from Army Secretary McCarthy. However, in Walker’s words, an “unusual” memorandum was issued by Acting Secretary of Defense Miller on January 4, 2021 that forbade Walker from deploying his troops near the Capitol without explicit approval from Miller himself.

This approval was not forthcoming, as Matthews explained in a 36-page memorandum last year, because then-Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy was “incommunicado or unreachable for most of the afternoon” of January 6.

The scale of the cover-up confirms the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site* and exposes the false narrative presented by the Democratic-led Select Committee, namely that Trump’s coup was organized solely by Trump and a few “crazies” in and around the Trump White House. The mass deletion of records by the major agencies charged with defending the government from threats “foreign and domestic” demonstrates that Trump’s coup had wide support throughout the US government and substantial sections of the ruling financial oligarchy.

That the heads of these agencies were involved in Trump’s conspiracy underscores the advanced breakdown of American democracy, which has not lessened with the election of President Joe Biden and Democratic control of both houses of Congress.

The opposite is the case. The Democrats are overseeing a massive coverup and allowing Trump, the fascistic Republican Party and their allies in the military, police and intelligence apparatus, allied with far-right paramilitary groups, to advance their conspiracy to overthrow the Constitution and impose a brutal dictatorship.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact