



ELECTIONS

# Did a Government Intel Asset Plant Key Evidence in Proud Boys Case?

We should be suspicious of weird coincidences.

By Julie Kelly



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It's week five of the Justice Department's most high-profile—and high-stakes—criminal trial related to the events of January 6, 2021. Five members of the Proud Boys face the rare “seditious conspiracy” charge. Guilty verdicts—almost certain given the government's near-perfect conviction rate for January 6 defendants—would build legal momentum for a similar indictment against Donald Trump. (The trial is so crucial that Matthew Graves, the Biden-appointed U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia responsible for prosecuting every January 6 case, has shown up in the courtroom on at least three occasions.)

Trump is a major figure in this trial, an unindicted coconspirator of sorts. Last week, Judge Timothy Kelly allowed prosecutors to play a clip of Trump's extemporaneous comment for the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by"—a remark uttered during a presidential debate in September 2020 more than three months before the Capitol protest. The Justice Department wants to portray the comment as a call to arms, tying the alleged "militia" group to the former president.

The clip is just another thin reed of evidence in the government's landmark domestic terrorism case. In fact, much of the "evidence" amounts to nothing more than worthless trinkets, braggadocious group chats, and otherwise protected political speech.

It now appears that one key piece of evidence was not the work of any defendant in this case but rather written by a one-time government intelligence asset with unusual ties to both the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, another group involved in January 6.

A document titled "1776 Returns" is cited by the government to indicate the group had an advanced plan to "attack" the Capitol. In two separate criminal indictments, prosecutors explained how the document ended up in the hands of Enrique Tarrío, the leader of the Proud Boys: "On December 30, 2020 [an unnamed] individual sent Tarrío a document—[that] set forth a plan to occupy a few 'crucial buildings' in Washington, D.C. on January 6, including House and Senate buildings around the Capitol, with 'as many people as possible' to 'show our politicians We the People are in charge.'"

Calling the document a "high-level summary," a prosecutor last week combed through each page of "1776 Returns" with an expert witness even though the government conceded there was no proof Tarrío opened the file or shared it with others.

"The plan, essentially, is to have individuals inside these buildings, either cause a distraction, or—pull fire alarms in other parts of the city to distract law enforcement so that a crowd can then rush the buildings and occupy the interior so they can demand a new election," FBI Agent Peter Dubrowski told the jury.

In other words, an "insurrection!"

But a bombshell motion filed over the weekend debunks the Justice Department's suggestion that the document was a product, or at least a roadmap, used to guide the group's conduct on January 6. The filing suggests that the handling of "1776 Returns," like so much of January 6, was yet another sting operation.

"It appears that the government itself is the author of the most incriminating and damning document in this case, which was mysteriously sent at government request to Proud Boy leader Enrique Tarrío immediately prior to January 6 in order to frame or implicate Tarrío in a

government created scheme to storm buildings around the Capitol,” wrote Roger Roots, attorney for Dominic Pezzola, in the motion seeking a mistrial. “As such, [the document] and the government’s efforts to frame or smear defendants with it, constitutes outrageous government conduct.”

Turns out, the person responsible for preparing the document is a man named Samuel Armes, a young cryptocurrency expert living in Florida. But Armes’ résumé raises many red flags, particularly in a case involving the use of multiple government informants.

Armes told the January 6 select committee last year that he has worked for the State Department and Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. “A lot of the work that I did for the government was in counterthreat finance or regulatory environments around crypto,” he testified.

As a student at the University of Southern Florida, Armes was enrolled in a special program that prepared graduates for a career in the intelligence sector. Armes told House investigators he was “groomed to be in the CIA, FBI, or any intel agencies.” When asked to clarify what that meant, Armes explained he was “trained and educated” to eventually work as an intelligence asset.

Part of that training required preparing different responses to potential terror threats. And Armes was no slouch. “I reported under Colonel [Joshua] Potter’s counterthreat finance unit. And I actually developed for them critical research on cryptocurrency that may have been used by drug cartels or ISIS. And so I did similar scenarios with them, wargaming scenarios, of why these terrorist groups might be using cryptocurrency and how they might go about doing so.”

That background in “war games” apparently motivated Armes to do the same before January 6. After reading reports about the Transition Integrity Project, a collection of high-level Trump foes plotting to remove Trump from office regardless of the election’s outcome, Armes said he felt compelled to perform his own “worst case scenario.”

Hence the “1776 Returns” paper.

But Armes’ explanation as to why he put thoughts on paper is strange, to say the least. His reasons for “brainstorming,” as he called it, what might happen after the election veered from the Terry Schiavo case—“when government authorities are kind of confused and people don’t know who to obey or who to answer to, anarchy kind of breaks out, and certain parties take advantage of that anarchy,” he said of the protracted legal battle over the famous right-to-die case two decades ago—to Trump’s unpredictability, to the 2020 summer riots, to total anarchy in the streets.

Even more odd is that his internal “brainstorming” document ended up in the inbox of Erica Flores, a business associate in Florida—who just happened to be Tarrío’s girlfriend at the time. “I

had told her that I was kind of brainstorming what I think might happen, and she seemed interested. And she asked if she could see it, and I said sure. And so I ended up sharing it with her on a Google Drive.”

Flores then sent the document to Tarrío.

Flores’ version of events, however, is quite different from Armes’ account. While he disputed being the sole author of the document, Flores reportedly told the January 6 committee that Armes wrote the whole thing. Further, contrary to Armes’ testimony to the committee, she said Armes told her to send it to Tarrío.

For now, it’s unclear whether the public, or more importantly, the defendants, will learn the truth about the origins of the “1776 Returns” missive. Armes admitted he cannot find the original document in his Google files. And although Flores spoke with the January 6 committee, her transcript is not publicly available, buried with hundreds more at the National Archives.

That’s not the end of Armes’ weird story; he also was in contact with a member of the Oath Keepers in 2020. Armes’ name showed up on a hotel reservation for James Beeks, now on trial in D.C. for his participation in the January 6 Capitol protest. When House investigators asked Armes why Beeks included his name on the same hotel room, Armes claimed the man had a romantic interest in him.

Armes also admitted he and Beeks had many conversations before January 6 on topics such as the election and domestic politics. But just like Armes’ original “1776” document, those messages are missing, too.

As evidence piles up to show how federal assets played an animating role before and on January 6, Armes’ weird account—and background in government intelligence—cannot be dismissed as coincidence.

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## About Julie Kelly

Julie Kelly is a political commentator and senior contributor to *American Greatness*. She is the author of *January 6: How Democrats Used the Capitol Protest to Launch a War on Terror Against the Political Right* and *Disloyal Opposition: How the NeverTrump Right Tried—And Failed—To Take Down the President*. Her past work can be found at *The Federalist* and *National Review*. She also has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Hill*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Forbes*, and *Genetic Literacy Project*. She is the co-host of the “Happy Hour Podcast with Julie and Liz.” She is a

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