

The Trump Campaign's Collusion With Israel

While US media fixated on Russian interference in the 2016 election, an Israeli secret agent's campaign to influence the outcome went unreported.

JAMES BAMFORD

“Roger, hello from Jerusalem,” read the message from the Israeli secret agent. Dated August 12, 2016, it was addressed to Roger Stone—at the time a key player in Donald Trump’s presidential election campaign. “Any progress? He is going to be defeated unless we intervene. We have critical intel. The key is in your hands! Back in the US next week.” Later, the agent promised, “October Surprise coming!”

While the American media and political system fixated on Russian President Vladimir Putin and his armies of cyber warriors, trolls, and bots, what was completely missed in the Russiagate investigation of 2016 was the Israeli connection. No details of it were ever revealed in the heavily redacted Mueller Report. Nor was there any mention of an Israeli plot in the similarly redacted Senate Intelligence Committee Report on collusion charges in the 2016 election, or in any of the indictments or trials stemming from the Russia charges. Nor did any mention of Israeli involvement ever leak into the press. Yet I can reveal here the details of an elaborate covert operation personally directed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that aimed to use secret intelligence to clandestinely intervene at the highest levels in the presidential election on behalf of Trump.

Shadowy hints of the plot only became visible with the little-noticed release in 2020 of a heavily redacted May 2018 FBI search warrant and its accompanying affidavit. As part of the Mueller investigation, the bureau had conducted an extensive search for any foreign interference in the 2016 election, and the warrant was directed at securing the Google accounts of a mysterious Israeli agent acting under the direction of someone identified as “PM.” The FBI agent who wrote the affidavit noted, “I believe ‘PM’ refers to the ‘Prime Minister.’”

In the spring of 2016, no issue was more important to Benjamin Netanyahu than Donald Trump winning the White House. The GOP presidential candidate was key to everything he was after, from ending the Iran nuclear agreement, to recognizing Jerusalem—rather than Tel Aviv—as Israel’s capital, to continuing the occupation of Palestine. But November was months away, and there was no guarantee Trump would win. In the meantime, Netanyahu was under mounting pressure from President Barack Obama to finally resolve the issues surrounding Palestine. Leading the charge on behalf of Obama was Secretary of State John Kerry, who was equally determined to find a solution after many years of trying.

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Kerry was not alone. The Middle East Quartet, a group formed to mediate the Palestine-Israel peace process that included representatives from the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and Russia, was also seeking a solution to the issues surrounding the occupation—and it was about to release a report that was expected to be highly critical of Israel. With so much on the line, Netanyahu appears to

have made a drastic decision. He would dispatch a discreet, highly trusted aide, armed with critical intelligence, to covertly “intervene” in the US election to help put his man Trump in the White House. Based on the FBI documents, the intelligence appears to have consisted of advance knowledge of Russia’s hacking of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign, and it may have included confidential details from the stolen e-mails. It was likely obtained by Israeli eavesdropping operations that were targeting secret Russian communications, as well as those of WikiLeaks.

Although the affidavit did not specify any individual defendants, the numerous potential criminal charges laid out in the FBI documents spoke to the seriousness of the Israeli plot. They included violation of the foreign contributions ban, which prohibits foreigners from contributing money or something of value to federal, state, or local elections. Other charges included aiding and abetting, conspiracy, wire fraud, and attempted conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Still another charge, “unauthorized access to a protected computer,” indicates Israel may have conducted illegal hacking operations. Based on the e-mails and text messages contained in the documents, the conspiracy began in the late spring of 2016, when it was beginning to appear that Trump had a good chance of winning the Republican nomination.

This was also when the FBI and the media began focusing heavily on possible Russian collusion with the Trump campaign, as a result of Moscow’s hacking of the DNC and the Clinton campaign. But while the Mueller investigation was never able to conclusively demonstrate any collusion with Russia, the FBI did uncover hard evidence of extensive collusion between close Trump associates and the highest levels of the Israeli government.

On the sixth floor of a concrete-and-glass high-rise just south of Tel Aviv, behind a door marked “Unit 17” in Hebrew, political operatives plot newer and more creative ways to use fraud to win elections across much of the planet. The 16-story Azrieli Business Center in Holon is home to Archimedes Group, a private intelligence company that boasts that it can “change reality according to our client’s wishes.” Those clients stretch from Africa to Latin America to Southeast Asia.

In Nigeria in 2018, the company’s campaign of lies and misinformation helped reelect former military coup leader Muhammadu Buhari as president. Hired by other would-be presidents and politicians around the world in at least 13 countries, Archimedes

soon had 3 million people following its phony Facebook and Instagram accounts. It even created bogus “fact-checking” accounts to lie about its fake news stories, claiming they were based on solid facts.

But in May 2019, Facebook caught on to the various scams and removed 265 Facebook and Instagram accounts from the orbit of the Archimedes operation. “Archimedes Group,” it said, “has repeatedly violated our misrepresentation and other policies, including by engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior. This organization and all its subsidiaries are now banned from Facebook, and it has been issued a cease and desist letter.”

Archimedes is hardly alone. An Israeli government official told the *Times of Israel* that outsourcing fake news and voter manipulation is a growth industry in Israel because many young Israelis who serve in intelligence units in the army are trained in the use of “avatars,” or fake identities, on social media. The Israeli government appears to have made no effort to halt or even curb the activity. Such inaction may be deliberate, since a number of the groups that engage in voter manipulation have close ties to the intelligence and defense agencies, possibly providing Netanyahu an opportunity to secretly manipulate foreign elections to Israel’s benefit.

In fact, a recent multinational journalistic investigation revealed that Israel has become a world center for the export of election fraud, fake news, hacking of private e-mails, and disinformation. Connections were discovered between private intelligence firms and both Israel’s Ministry of Defense and the firm Cambridge Analytica, which illegally collected data from more than 87 million Facebook users for use in the 2016 presidential campaigns of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz.

The eight-month international collaborative project involved journalists from 30 news outlets, including Israel’s *Haaretz*, the UK’s *Guardian* and *Observer*, France’s *Le Monde*, Germany’s *Der Spiegel*, and Spain’s *El Pais*. They discovered an Israel-based “global private market in disinformation aimed at elections,” according to *The Guardian*. Among the individuals unmasked was Tal Hanan, a former Israeli special forces operative and the head of a secretive organization with the code name “Team Jorge” whose specialty was weaponizing disinformation worldwide “to covertly meddle in elections without a trace,” said *The Guardian*.

Hanan told the undercover reporters that his services had been used in Africa, South and Central America, the US, and Europe, and that his company had completed “33 presidential-level campaigns, 27 of which were successful.”

What was not revealed in this investigation, however, was the separate and far more covert operation undertaken by Netanyahu and his secret agent to clandestinely manipulate America’s 2016 presidential election for Netanyahu’s own political purposes.

For years, the man Netanyahu relied on to do battle with Kerry and the Quartet was his top personal aide, Isaac Molho, a secretive and shadowy private attorney who was trusted with the prime minister’s most sensitive missions. “There has probably never been a person in the history of this country in such a desirable position as Isaac Molho,” *Haaretz* noted. “He enjoys almost complete silence from the media.... On Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s instructions, Molho undertakes sensitive missions to countries with which Israel has no diplomatic ties. The Mossad supplies him with logistical backing, security and transport.”

Some of Molho’s assignments are too sensitive even for the Mossad—a fact that has at times frustrated those at the spy agency. “The Mossad gritted its teeth over the past eight years while watching the diplomatic missions carried out by Isaac Molho, without any requirement to take a polygraph test and as a private citizen with business and other affairs that are not subject to civil service regulations,” *Haaretz* said. In addition to national loyalty, Molho, whose wife is Netanyahu’s cousin, may even be acting out of family loyalty.

Although the secret agent’s name was redacted from the FBI’s search warrant, his profile, as outlined in the accompanying affidavit, is strikingly similar to that of Isaac Molho. Like Molho, who was described by *Haaretz* as a “discreet man for sensitive missions,” the secret agent is described as highly trusted and very close to Netanyahu. Most important, at one point, according to the affidavit, the agent was summoned from the US to Rome at a moment’s notice to be by Netanyahu’s side on a date the Israeli prime minister was conducting negotiations with John Kerry in the Italian capital over Palestine. This critical role was for many years played exclusively by Molho. In addition, the agent referred to in the warrant had enough clout and authority to direct the actions of two other high-ranking Israeli officials involved in

the clandestine operation to influence the results of the US election. Molho did not respond to *The Nation*'s request for comment.

The key for the Israeli agent was finding a back door—a covert channel—to Trump. Roger Stone, long a key Trump aide, fit the bill. Although Stone had formally left the campaign, he and Trump spoke frequently and confidentially. For these calls, Trump would often use the phone of his security director, Keith Schiller, “because he did not want his advisers to know they were talking,” according to Sam Nunberg, a political adviser who served on Trump’s 2016 election campaign. Stone energetically supported Israel’s harsh occupation of the Palestinian territories and its bellicose stance toward Iran; following Trump’s speech at an American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference in March 2016, Stone noted approvingly that “Donald Trump is a radical Zionist.”

Another Trump aide heavily involved in the conspiracy, according to the FBI documents, was Stone’s associate Jerome Corsi, who appears to have been the original contact who connected the Israelis to Stone. An ultraconservative journalist with a doctorate in political science from Harvard and the author of a shelf of books harshly critical of liberals and Democrats, Corsi was a leading literary light of the extreme right. He gained fame in 2004 for his “swiftboating” attacks on the military record of then–presidential candidate John Kerry. The secret agent was particularly drawn to Corsi’s adulation of Israel and support for its belligerence toward Iran.

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Hiding behind his online pseudonym “jrlc,” Corsi was also a virulent Islamophobe. Posting on the conservative forum FreeRepublic.com, he has called Islam “a virus” and “a worthless, dangerous Satanic religion” and has written that “Islam is a peaceful religion as long as the women are beaten, the boys buggered, and the infidels killed.”

After Corsi provided contact information to Stone, the secret Israeli agent and Stone connected. Then, on May 17, the agent wrote, “Hi Roger, I hope all is well. Our dinner tonight for 7PM is confirmed. I arrive at 4PM. Please suggest a good restaurant that has privacy.” The original plan was for Stone and the agent to meet alone, but Stone wanted to bring Corsi along as backup. “I am uncomfortable meeting without Jerry,” Stone wrote, and then rescheduled the dinner for the next day.

According to the FBI warrant, the same day that Stone communicated with the Israeli agent, he began Googling some very strange terms, including “guccifer” and “dcleaks.” It would be nearly a month before those same terms would make headlines around the world. On June 14, *The Washington Post* reported that the DNC had been hacked by Russian government agents. The next day, someone calling himself “Guccifer 2.0” took credit for the attack. He claimed to be an American hacktivist, but according to a Justice Department indictment in July 2018, he was actually a Russian GRU employee. Soon afterward, the website DCLeaks—another front for the GRU—began releasing hacked Democratic Party documents.

The timing implies that the Israeli agent was Stone’s most likely source of confirmed details of a Russian cyberattack on the DNC, a month before it became known to anyone outside of the Kremlin and the GRU. If that’s the case, there are two critical questions: How did the Israeli agent know, and why was he revealing the details to a close associate of Trump rather than to the Obama administration, Israel’s supposed ally?

On May 18, the day after Stone’s Google searches, Stone, Corsi, and the Israeli agent met for dinner at the 21 Club on 52nd Street in New York City. The restaurant, which features a balcony lined with painted iron lawn jockeys, was a regular Trump hangout. At the top of the agent’s agenda was getting Stone to quickly set up a confidential meeting with the candidate. The next day, the agent pressed Stone in an e-mail: “Did You Talk To Trump This Morning? Any News?” But Stone was coy. “Contact made—interrupted—mood good.”

Then, in early June, according to the Senate Intelligence Committee Report, Stone learned that Julian Assange, the head of WikiLeaks, was about to release something “big.” Stone relayed the details to Rick Gates, Trump’s deputy campaign manager, and told him that Assange appeared to have Clinton’s e-mails. Yet it wasn’t until later, on

June 12, that Assange would publicly announce that WikiLeaks had “emails relating to Hillary Clinton which are pending publication.”

These were the first of many tips to Stone that appear to have come from his new Israeli friend. Two days later, the DNC announced that it had been hacked by Russia. The day after that, Stone again Googled “Guccifer” and “dcleaks,” hours before Guccifer 2.0 publicly claimed responsibility. On June 21, as Guccifer released more documents, the Israeli agent notified Stone that he was in New York accompanied by a senior official and would like a meeting with Trump. “RS: Secret,” said the message, according to the FBI documents. “Cabinet Minister [redacted] in NYC. Available for DJT meeting.”

Other parts of the message were also redacted, but in the affidavit the FBI revealed the cabinet minister’s official title: “According to publicly-available information, during this time [redacted] was a Minister without portfolio in the [redacted] cabinet dealing with issues concerning defense and foreign affairs.” At the time, the only minister without portfolio in the Israeli government was Tzachi Hanegbi, one of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s oldest and closest confidants, and Wikipedia (the likely source of the FBI agent’s “publicly- available information”) uses nearly identical language to describe him. Israeli press reports at the time indicated that Hanegbi was in the United States on that date as part of a delegation attending the unveiling of Israel’s new F-35 stealth fighter jet.

Married to an American from Florida and fluent in English, Hanegbi previously held a post as minister of intelligence supervising Mossad and Shin Bet, the Israeli internal security service. The question is, why would a high-level confidant of Netanyahu’s, with an intelligence background and close American links, seek a secret meeting with a US presidential candidate?

Trump had been busy, hustling from city to city on the campaign trail and hitting several rallies a day. Taking valuable time to meet a couple of Israeli contacts was not a high priority, especially without any idea what the meeting would be about. So, on June 25, Hanegbi returned to Israel. “Roger, Minister left,” said the Israeli agent. “Sends greetings from PM. When am I meeting DJT? Should I stay or leave Sunday as planned?” The next day, Stone replied, “I would not leave as we hope to schedule the meeting mon or tues.”

One possible explanation of the agent's sense of urgency was Obama's and Kerry's increasing pressure on Netanyahu to resolve the Palestinian issue. A key element of that solution would be agreeing to negotiate an equitable division of Jerusalem, since both sides claimed it as their capital. But if his secret agent could confidentially meet with Trump and get a commitment that, if elected, he would support keeping Jerusalem undivided, then Netanyahu could ignore Obama. An election win for Trump, therefore, would also be a win for Netanyahu. Especially since the candidate was already fully committed to another key issue for Netanyahu: canceling the nuclear deal with Iran.

Suddenly, there was a change in plans. According to the FBI documents, the agent was ordered by Netanyahu to postpone the appointment with Trump and instead get on the next plane for Rome. In a last-minute effort to find a solution to Jerusalem and the Palestinian issue, meetings in the Italian capital were set up between Netanyahu, Kerry, and the European Union's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini. Netanyahu wanted his aide, the agent, at his side. At the meeting, the elephant in the room was a forthcoming report by the Middle East Quartet. It was expected by all to be extremely critical of Israel for its apartheid settlement policies and its treatment of the occupied Palestinians.

The night before the meeting, Netanyahu and Kerry met for dinner at Pierluigi, a popular seafood restaurant in Piazza de Ricci, a block from the Tiber. "What is your plan for the Palestinians?" Kerry asked as the prime minister began chain-smoking a batch of thick Cuban cigars. "What do you want to happen now?" Netanyahu offered a vague response involving a regional initiative, but Kerry wasn't buying it. "You have no path of return to direct talks with the Palestinians, or a channel to talks with Arab countries," Kerry told the prime minister, according to Haaretz. "You've hit the glass ceiling. What's your plan?" he asked again. But Netanyahu may well have had one: to use his agent, perhaps sitting with them at that very table, to help put Trump in the White House.

On June 28, after the meeting in Rome had concluded, the agent quickly dashed off another message to Stone: "RETURNING TO DC AFTER URGENT CONSULTATIONS WITH PM IN ROME. MUST MEET WITH YOU WED. EVE AND WITH DJ TRUMP THURSDAY IN NYC."

The meeting with Trump was rescheduled for 1 pm on Wednesday, July 6, before the candidate took off for a rally in Sharonville, Ohio. The Israeli agent flew to New York the day before and checked into the St. Regis, the French Beaux Arts–style hotel on East 55th Street. The next morning, he had planned to rendezvous with Stone in the lobby for a pre-meeting discussion. “At the St Regis With Lt General. Waiting For You Thank You,” he wrote.

But there were problems involving secrecy. Stone, at his home in Florida, had come down with a bad cold and was too ill to travel, so he arranged for Corsi to make the introduction. That made the Israeli agent uncomfortable because of the sensitive nature of the discussion. “I have to meet Trump alone,” he said, and they agreed that Corsi would leave after the introduction. There was still another problem, however. The meeting was meant to be secret, but the agent was accompanied by an Israeli lieutenant general. So once again the meeting had to be postponed.

Who was this lieutenant general? Unlike in the United States, where the highest military rank is a four-star general, in Israel it’s a three-star lieutenant general, and there is only one, the chief of the General Staff, the commander in chief of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)—the equivalent of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At the time, that was Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot. But it’s unlikely that Eizenkot was the person waiting in the lobby of the St. Regis to meet with Trump. Eizenkot had little to do with the election—and had actually sided with Obama on the issue of Iran. In January 2016, he said that the nuclear deal “had actually removed the most serious danger to Israel’s existence for the foreseeable future, and greatly reduced the threat over the longer term.”

Instead, it may have been Eizenkot’s predecessor, Benny Gantz, who had retired as head of the IDF in February 2015 but still held the rank of lieutenant general in the reserves and was often referred to by his military title. He was in charge of the IDF during Israel’s war on Palestinians in Gaza in 2014. It was a war that produced a “vastly disproportionate” number of civilian deaths: 1,400 of the nearly 2,300 people killed in the conflict, according to Human Rights Watch. Gantz would later boast that “parts of Gaza were sent back to the Stone Age.”

In May 2020, Gantz would become the second-most-powerful person in Israel under Netanyahu, as the alternate prime minister. At the time of the canceled meeting with Trump, however, he was the chairman of Fifth Dimension, an Israeli private

intelligence company run by a former deputy head of Mossad, with another former Mossad member as CEO.

Fifth Dimension wasn't the only Israeli spy company with close ties to Israeli intelligence. Another was Psy Group, a private intelligence firm that operated under the motto "Shape Reality." Earlier that year, on behalf of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, Psy Group had carried out Project Butterfly, a covert operation that spied on and attacked Americans who supported the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In April 2016, it offered Trump campaign official Rick Gates another secret operation, Project Rome. The subtitle of the six-page proposal clearly spelled out its objective to covertly interfere with the US presidential election: "Campaign Intelligence & Influence Services Proposal."

Secrecy was paramount. "We recommend keeping this activity compartmentalized and on need-to-know basis since secrecy is a key factor in the success of the activity," the proposal said. "Due to the sensitivity of some of the activities and the need for compartmentalization and secrecy, Psy Group will use code names." Trump was called "Lion," Hillary Clinton was "Forest," and Ted Cruz was "Bear." "This document details the services proposed by Psy Group for the 'Lion' project between now and July 2016," the proposal noted, referring to the period of the US primaries.

The Project Rome proposal read like an official Ministry of Strategic Affairs or Mossad operational document, referring to "multisource intelligence collection," "covert sources," "automated collection and analysis," and an "intelligence dossier on each target, including actionable intelligence." "Once the information has been uncovered or extracted, it is delivered to the Influence platform for use in the campaign as needed," the proposal said.

Project Rome's "Influence+ process" platform involved targeting American voters through "authentic-looking 3rd party platforms"—that is, fake news sites—and also through the use of "tailored avatars," thousands of phony social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook. "The purpose of these platforms is to engage the targets and actively convince them or sway their opinion towards our goals." The "targets" were unwitting American voters. "The team will include over 40 intelligence and influence experts," the document said. Then there were what internal company e-mails called "physical world ops like counter protesters, hecklers, etc." The

techniques were nearly identical to those used by the Israeli firms Archimedes Group and “Team Jorge” to secretly throw elections around the world.

The price tag for the operation was \$3,210,000, with another \$100,000 for media expenses and \$400,000 more for “negative opposition.” It appears that Gates, wisely, passed on Project Rome. The key players behind Psy Group later formed a new Israeli company, Percepto International. Also investigated by the international journalism collaboration, it was labeled “an Israeli factory for online deception” by Haaretz.

Despite the Trump campaign’s rejection of Project Rome, covert high-level approaches to Roger Stone to get directly to Trump continued.

“Hi Roger,” the Israeli agent wrote on July 8. “Have you rescheduled the meeting with DJT? The PM is putting pressure for a quick decision.” Stone wrote back that Trump would not be back in New York until after the Republican National Convention, so the meeting would have to be postponed until then. He added, “Sorry about the fiasco last week, however you can’t just bring the General without tell[ing] me.”

As Trump stormed the Midwest for votes, Guccifer 2.0 was making final preparations for another major release of documents. On July 14, Guccifer sent WikiLeaks an e-mail titled “big archive,” with a one-gigabyte encrypted attachment. Four days later, on July 18, the WikiLeaks Twitter account notified Guccifer the data had been received and that release of the hacked DNC e-mails was planned for later in the week.

On or around the next day, Donald Trump was in his New York office venting at the press for its criticism of his wife Melania’s Republican convention address the night before. There were accusations that she had borrowed passages from a speech by Michelle Obama. At some point, however, according to Trump attorney Michael Cohen’s Senate Intelligence Committee testimony, Trump took a phone call from Roger Stone.

“Roger, how are you?” said Trump.

“Good,” Stone replied. “Just want to let you know I got off the telephone a moment ago with Julian Assange. And in a couple of days, there’s going to be a massive dump of e-mails that’s going to be extremely damaging to the Clinton campaign.”

Trump was pleased. “Uh, that’s good. Keep me posted,” he said into a small black speaker box on his desk. Sitting nearby was Michael Cohen. “Do you believe him? Do you think Roger really spoke to Assange?” Trump asked.

“I don’t know,” Cohen said. “Roger is Roger, and for all you know, he was looking on his Twitter account. I don’t know the answer.”

In the end, neither Mueller’s team nor the FBI could ever find any substantive or conspiratorial communications between Stone and WikiLeaks. He had exchanged a few innocuous messages with Guccifer, later reviewed by the FBI, but there was no indication of how Stone could have known what he knew—which left only one apparent explanation: that the information had been passed to him by Netanyahu’s agent. As in the case of the DNC hack, the information was 100 percent accurate. There was never any evidence that Stone learned of the releases from either WikiLeaks or the Russians, but during that period both he and Jerome Corsi were in contact with the Israeli agent. Israel’s version of the NSA, Unit 8200, which employs some of the most highly trained signals intelligence specialists in the world and is equipped with advanced intercept capabilities, may well have been surveilling Russia and WikiLeaks.

Three days later, on July 22, as Hillary Clinton was preparing to announce her choice of a running mate on the eve of the Democratic National Convention, WikiLeaks released approximately 20,000 e-mails stolen from the DNC. “I guess Roger was right,” Trump told Cohen. Paul Manafort, Trump’s campaign manager, agreed. Sitting on the tarmac in his plane, about to take off for his next rally, Trump delayed the flight for half an hour to work the messages into his speech. Hungry for more, he later told Manafort to keep in touch with Stone about future WikiLeaks releases.

On Wednesday, July 29, the Israeli agent was back in touch with Stone and Corsi and eager to connect with Trump now that the convention was over and he was the Republican nominee. “HI ROGER,” the agent wrote. “HAVE YOU SET UP A NEW MEETING WITH TRUMP? I PLAN TO BE BACK IN THE US NEXT WEEK. PLEASE ADVISE. THANK YOU.” Stone sent a message to Manafort about finding a time to communicate, writing that there was “good shit happening.” The next day, the two spoke on the phone for 68 minutes. The following day, July 31, Stone had two phone calls with Trump that lasted over 10 minutes.

Then on Tuesday, August 2, despite previous failed attempts to connect with Assange, Corsi was nevertheless able to send a detailed message to Stone about WikiLeaks' future plans:

Word is friend in embassy plans 2 more dumps. One shortly after I'm back. 2nd in Oct. Impact planned to be very damaging.... Time to let more than Podesta to be exposed as in bed w enemy if they are not ready to drop HRC. That appears to be the game hackers are now about. Would not hurt to start suggesting HRC old, memory bad, has stroke—neither he nor she well. I expect that much of next dump focus, setting stage for Foundation debacle.

Corsi later told Stone that there was “more to come than anyone realizes. Won't really get started until after Labor Day.” The details, including the first indication that Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta was a target, were coming from somewhere other than Assange.

“Roger—As per PM we have one last shot before moving on,” the Israeli agent wrote to Stone on August 9. “Can you deliver? History will not forgive us. TRUMP IN FREE FALL. OCTOBER SURPRISE COMING!” What the “October Surprise” consisted of was left unexplained, but the implication was that there would be a spectacular new release of stolen e-mails, possibly centering on Podesta.

Three days later, the agent was even more frantic. He sent Stone his “hello from Jerusalem” message, promising that his government was prepared to “intervene” in the US election to help Trump win the presidency and offering to share critical intelligence to make it happen. Stone replied cryptically: “Matters complicated. Pondering.” Then, the following week, on August 20, Corsi suggested a meeting with the secret agent to determine “what if anything Israel plans to do in Oct.”

From the messages, it appears that Israel either had its own October Surprise planned or was aware of Guccifer's planned release of the Podesta e-mails before the election. The day after Corsi suggested meeting with Netanyahu's agent, Stone for the first time publicly indicated that Podesta would soon become a target of WikiLeaks—thereby predicting the event six weeks before it happened. “Trust me, it will soon be the [sic] Podesta's time in the barrel. #CrookedHillary,” said his tweet. Since neither Assange nor Guccifer was a source for either Corsi or Stone, the tweet once again points to the

Israeli agent who was in communication with both of them about the October Surprise.

The prospect of an October Surprise, along with the offer of critical intelligence, apparently got Trump's attention. On September 25, he and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, met privately with Netanyahu and Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer in his Trump Tower penthouse. Later that day, he publicly announced that if he was elected, his administration would finally "recognize Jerusalem as the undivided capital of the State of Israel." Since 1947, there has been virtual unanimity within the international community—and among US presidents—that the future of Jerusalem must be the subject of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Now Trump was vowing to trash that consensus, along with the Palestinians, and support Netanyahu's agenda. Whether Trump and the Israeli agent ever met in person is unclear. By late summer, Stone and Corsi were becoming increasingly concerned about potential charges, and to eliminate a paper trail they began meeting only in private with the agent. What is very clear, however, is that in the end Netanyahu got what he wanted—and so did Trump.

■ Around the same time, Stone had a conversation with Paul Manafort, who by then had left the campaign but stayed in communication with Trump's political circles. According to Manafort's later Senate Intelligence Committee testimony, Stone told him that "John Podesta was going to be in the barrel," repeating the claim he made by tweet on August 21, and that "there were going to be leaks of John Podesta's emails." A few days later, on September 29, Stone called Trump, who was on the way to New York's LaGuardia Airport in his black bulletproof limo. After concluding the call, Trump told Rick Gates, who was sitting next to him, that "more releases of damaging information would be coming."

On October 7, WikiLeaks unleashed 2,050 Podesta e-mails that were damaging to Hillary Clinton and her campaign—just as Stone had predicted a month and a half earlier. But Stone's concern about potential criminal charges seems to have turned into outright paranoia. Given that he had no close links to Assange or the Russians, the likely focus of his concerns were his numerous communications with the Israeli secret agent. After all, Stone had discussed clandestine foreign intervention in a presidential election, had made arrangements for Trump to meet a foreign agent, and had predicted the October Surprise. The prospect that authorities might look into any of these actions could certainly have been sufficient to rattle his nerves.

By secretly assisting Netanyahu's agent in an attempt to make contact with a presidential candidate—aware that he intended to interfere in the US election on behalf of his country—both Stone and Corsi could have faced serious charges as agents of a foreign power under Section 951 of the criminal code, which makes it a crime to covertly assist a foreign government without registering.

Even before WikiLeaks released the Podesta e-mails in October, Stone and Corsi seemed to become nervous that someone would discover their back channel. Soon after the “Podesta's time in the barrel” tweet in August, Stone and Corsi tried to find a way to somehow account for that unique insight. On August 30, Corsi said in his 2019 book *Silent No More*, “I suggested Stone could use me as an excuse, claiming my research on Podesta and Russia was the basis for Stone's prediction that Podesta would soon be in the pickle barrel.” He added, “I knew this was a cover-story, in effect not true, since I recalled telling Stone earlier in August that Assange had Podesta e-mails that he planned to drop as the ‘October Surprise.’” The next day, Corsi said, he e-mailed to Stone “a nine-page background memorandum on John Podesta that I had written that day at Stone's request.”

Following the Podesta dump, the cover-up became more frantic. Stone ordered Corsi to delete e-mails related to Podesta and hid his own communications with Corsi about WikiLeaks. Stone also pointed a finger at Randy Credico, a onetime friend who had a radio program in New York, as his back channel to WikiLeaks. Credico had interviewed Assange on his program, but that was four days after Stone's tweet about Podesta's upcoming time in the barrel. Credico denied under oath that he had acted as a back channel for Stone, and there was never any evidence to show he had.

In a predawn raid on January 25, 2019, heavily armed FBI agents stormed Roger Stone's Fort Lauderdale, Fla., home and placed him under arrest. He was charged with seven criminal offenses, including one count of obstruction of an official proceeding, five counts of false statements, and one count of witness tampering. Later that day, Stone was released on a \$250,000 signature bond. Defiant, he said he would refuse to “bear false witness” against Trump. Finally, on November 15, 2019, after a weeklong trial and two days of deliberations, Stone was convicted on all counts and sentenced to 40 months in federal prison. But on July 10, 2020, a few days before Stone was to turn himself in, Trump commuted his sentence, personally calling him with the news.

Throughout this chain of events—including the trial, the Mueller Report, and the nearly 1,000-page Senate Intelligence Committee Report—no hint of the involvement of Israel was made public. Despite the clear violations of US law and months of clandestine, high-level attempted interference in the presidential election, no details were released, and no congressional hearings or investigations took place. Nor was there ever a hint in the press, which remained transfixed by Russia.

The evidence, however, suggests that throughout the summer and into the fall of 2016, Israel illegally interfered in the US presidential election. A top agent of Netanyahu was secretly offering intelligence and other covert assistance to Trump to get him elected—all with virtually no oversight or scrutiny by the FBI or the US media, though both had numerous personnel in Israel at the time. Now Netanyahu is back in office as prime minister, and Trump is once again running for president. All the ingredients are there for history to repeat itself, unless the Justice Department and Congress conduct long-overdue investigations into the real source of secret foreign collaboration and interference in the 2016 election, and both the FBI and the media remove their self-imposed blinders when it comes to Israel. **N**

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James Bamford

James Bamford is a best-selling author, Emmy-nominated filmmaker, and winner of the National Magazine Award for Reporting. His most recent book is *Spyfail: Foreign Spies, Moles, Saboteurs, and the Collapse of America's Counterintelligence*, from which much of the material in this article has been adapted..