

New York Times tries character assassination against WikiLeaks founder Assange

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The response of the *New York Times* to WikiLeaks' posting of classified American military documents exposing US war crimes in Iraq is to downplay the atrocities and portray WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as the criminal party.

The newspaper of record of the American liberal establishment is not outraged by further proof of murder and torture on a mass scale, implicating the highest officials in both the Bush and Obama administrations, but instead reserves its fury for those courageous individuals who have dared to breach the government-media wall of silence and give the public access to some portion of the horrific truth about the US war in Iraq.

The *Times* assigned the job of character assassination to an old hand at penning cover-ups and apologetics for US imperialist operations, John F. Burns. The British-born journalist has headed *Times* bureaus in such strategic capitals as Moscow and Beijing. As head of the *Times*' Baghdad bureau in the lead-up to the US invasion of Iraq, Burns played a major role in the newspaper's promotion of US government lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Burns has been London bureau chief since mid-2007. On Sunday, the *Times* published a front-page piece over the joint byline of John F. Burns and Ravi Somaiya and bearing the disparaging headline: "WikiLeaks Chief on Run, Trailed by His Notoriety." The article purports to be based on an interview with Assange conducted in London on October 17. By that time, the *Times* had had access for close to two weeks to the nearly 400,000 military logs released to the public on Friday by WikiLeaks.

The article drips with malice. One of its aims—to depict Assange as a sinister figure, suffering from delusions of grandeur and paranoia—is indicated by the

opening sentence: "Julian Assange moves like a hunted man."

In public places he speaks "barely above a whisper to foil the Western intelligence agencies he fears," the authors note, adding, "He demands that his dwindling number of loyalists use expensive encrypted cell-phones and swaps his own as other men exchange shirts."

Such facts are meant to show that, in the words of an Icelandic "political activist" quoted in the article, "He is not in his right mind."

Burns and Somaiya acknowledge that "Pentagon and Justice Department officials have said they are weighing [Assange's] actions under the 1917 Espionage Act." They cite, in order to discredit Assange, the fact that Swedish authorities, undoubtedly under pressure from Washington, are considering filing sex charges against the WikiLeaks leader.

Yet Assange's concern for his personal security and that of WikiLeaks are nevertheless cited as evidence of criminality or madness. The *Times* ignores the fact that the US government employs targeted assassinations and kidnappings as instruments of foreign policy and that the Obama administration has gone to court to defend the president's "right" to rain down predator missiles on people he has labeled as terrorists, including American citizens.

The article continues: "Now it is not just governments that denounce him: some of his own comrades are abandoning him for what they see as erratic and imperious behavior, and a nearly delusional grandeur unmatched by an awareness that the digital secrets he reveals can have a price in flesh and blood."

The "price in flesh and blood" is an allusion to the charge made after WikiLeaks' July release of US

military documents on the war in Afghanistan that Assange had compromised the safety of Afghans serving as informers for US and NATO occupation forces. By the same logic, it would have been incumbent on the American press to denounce supporters of the resistance who exposed informers and collaborators of the Nazi occupation forces in Europe during World War II.

Burns and his co-writer assert that “Mr. Assange’s detractors also accuse him of pursuing a vendetta against the United States.” Presumably as proof of Assange’s irrational hostility toward the US, the article notes: “In London, Mr. Assange said America was an increasingly militarized society and a threat to democracy.” It appears that this entirely justified view of contemporary America is, as far as the *Times* is concerned, self-evidently absurd.

The article provides an indication of the lengths to which the *Times* has gone to solicit damaging allegations from former Assange associates and show, in the authors’ words, that “faith is fading among his fellow conspirators.”

“The *New York Times* spoke with dozens of people who have worked with him and supported him in Iceland, Sweden, Germany, Britain and the United States,” the article states. It cites “an encrypted online chat, a transcript of which was passed to the *Times*,” which supposedly shows that Assange is “dismissive of his colleagues.”

Passed on by whom? The authors do not say. But the answer is obvious.

It was passed on by the US government, with which the *Times* is working in lockstep to smear Assange and set him up for prosecution or something worse. That this is not mere speculation is indicated by an ominous passage in the article, which asserts that Assange has become the world’s leading revealer of secrets in the Internet era, “with as yet unreckoned consequences for himself.”



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