

# New York Times launches McCarthyite witch-hunt against Julian Assange

Bill Van Auken  
2 September 2016

The *New York Times* Thursday published an article entitled “How Russia Often Benefits When Julian Assange Reveals the West’s Secrets.” The 5,000-word piece, covering three columns of the top half of its front page, boasts three bylines. Presented as a major investigative news article, it is a piece of pro-government propaganda, whose style and outright character assassination against the WikiLeaks founder seems to have been cribbed from the vilest McCarthyite smear jobs of the 1950s.

Stringing together half-truths, innuendos, totally unsubstantiated assertions presented as facts and vicious ad hominem attacks on a man who has been persecuted and is effectively imprisoned because of his exposures of the crimes of US imperialism, the article has essentially three related purposes.

The first is to brand Assange as a “dupe” if not outright agent of the Kremlin and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The second is to discredit in advance any forthcoming information from WikiLeaks exposing the sordid and potentially indictable activities of the favored presidential candidate of both the *Times* and the US military and intelligence complex, Democrat Hillary Clinton.

And the third and most essential is to advance the relentless propaganda campaign mounted by the *New York Times* to prepare public opinion for military confrontation with Russia and intimidate and undermine the broad popular opposition of the American people to war.

This anti-Russian campaign was sharply escalated following the WikiLeaks release last month of Democratic National Committee emails exposing the collaboration of the DNC leadership and the Clinton camp in the attempt to sabotage the campaign of her rival, Bernie Sanders.

The response of Clinton and her supporters was to suppress any discussion about the content of the emails by waging a hysterical campaign indicting the release of material as a national security crisis deliberately provoked by the Kremlin in an attempt to subvert the US elections. This led to the open suggestion that Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is Putin’s pawn, a theme that has been promoted as part of Clinton’s bid to rally the Republican national security establishment behind her campaign on a platform of aggressive war.

The *Times* piece repeats this type of unfounded allegation, stating, “United States officials say they believe with a high degree of confidence that the Democratic Party material was hacked by the Russian government.” Who are these “United States

officials?” What is the basis of their “high degree of confidence?” What, if any, evidence exists to substantiate this allegation? The lengthy *Times* piece includes not a word in answer to any of these questions.

Nonetheless, using this unsubstantiated allegation as its foundation, the article advances its agenda with the kind of innuendo that the anti-communist witch-hunters of the House Un-American Activities Committee would have instantly recognized: “Has WikiLeaks become a laundering machine for compromising material gathered by the Russians. And more broadly, what precisely is the relationship between Mr. Assange and Mr. Putin’s Kremlin?”

To bolster its political indictment, the *Times* asserts, “Whether by conviction or coincidence, WikiLeaks document releases, along with many of Mr. Assange’s statements, have often benefited Russia, at the expense of the West.”

Among these “statements,” the *Times* paraphrases Assange’s comments in a televised interview last September, asserting that the US “has achieved imperial power by proclaiming allegiance to principles of human rights while deploying its military-intelligence apparatus in ‘pincer’ formation to ‘push’ countries into doing its bidding.”

It cites his charge that the 2014 coup in Ukraine was the result of Washington “trying to draw Ukraine into the Western orbit.” It also accuses him of being critical of NATO, an organization that “Putin would like nothing more than to defang or dismantle.”

It accuses WikiLeaks of publishing damning “leaks of material from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which are United States allies.” The article further adds that the leaks “came during times of heightened tensions between those countries and Russia.”

It even attributes its publication of documents exposing secret talks on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a US-sponsored trade and investment deal devised as an economic arm of the US “pivot” to Asia and the military buildup against China, to the hidden hand of the Kremlin, because Russia was also excluded from the pact.

Given these criteria, one can only conclude that anyone who opposes US imperialist interventions, or, indeed, employs their critical faculties in relation to any aspect of US foreign policy, stands in danger of being indicted by the *Times* as an “agent” or “dupe” of the Kremlin.

Further “evidence” uncovered by the sleuths of the *Times* that Assange is a Kremlin asset, is that he appeared in a short-lived television series broadcast in 2012 by Russia Today (RT), a

television network partially funded by the Russian government. The article suggests that the show was a hidden means for the Putin government to keep WikiLeaks afloat. “How much he or WikiLeaks was paid for the 12 episodes remains unclear,” it comments.

Assange, however, was not employed by RT, but rather the network (like a dozen other broadcasters) paid a fee to air the program. Under similar arrangements, RT regularly broadcasts a series featuring Larry King, the 25-year veteran interviewer of CNN’s “Larry King Live.” So far he has not been named by the *Times* as a suspect.

In the course of its report, the *Times* quotes Gavin MacFadyen, a WikiLeaks supporter and director of the University of London-based Centre for Investigative Journalism, as noting that “intelligence services had a long history of using news organizations to plant stories, and that Western news outlets published ‘material that comes from the C.I.A. uncritically.’”

Of course the premier example of this practice is to be found in the record of the *New York Times* itself, most infamously in placing both its news and editorial pages at the service of the Bush administration’s preparation of a war of aggression against Iraq, promoting and embellishing upon the phony intelligence about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction.”

Two of the three bylines on the *Times* hit piece against Julian Assange bear closer examination. One is that of Eric Schmitt, the newspaper’s national security correspondent, who serves as a regular conduit for the CIA and the Pentagon. Among his services rendered was a 2002 feature article, published at the height of the CIA’s waterboarding and other “enhanced interrogation techniques.” Sarcastically headlined “There are ways to make you talk,” the article was based entirely on the lying assurances of US officials that the interrogation methods being employed by the American military and CIA were all in strict compliance with the Geneva Conventions and that “torture is not an option.”

Schmitt was also heavily involved in the *Times*’ handling of the major document leaks by WikiLeaks, which exposed US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as US conspiracies around the globe, in the “Cablegate” release of State Department documents.

He was one of the *Times* reporters who was sent to the White House in 2010 to brief Obama administration officials on the contents of the material obtained by WikiLeaks and to consult on how the newspaper should handle it.

The newspaper’s then-Editor Bill Keller commented that the US government had praised the *Times* for “handling the documents with care.” In describing the paper’s treatment of the WikiLeaks revelations, Keller said that “in consultation with government officials,” the newspaper censored any information that “could harm the national interest.”

He went on to enunciate an Orwellian vision for the role of the media: “We agree wholeheartedly that transparency is not an absolute good. Freedom of the press includes freedom not to publish, and that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity.”

In early 2011, Schmitt was cited as the source for a vicious personal attack on Assange, penned by Keller in defending his role as a gatekeeper for the US security services in the WikiLeaks

affair. Schmitt is quoted as describing Assange as looking “like a bag lady walking in off the street,” and having “smelled as if he hadn’t bathed in days.”

In relation to Assange, who is under constant surveillance by the US intelligence agencies, has been described as a “terrorist” by US officials, and whose assassination has been regularly demanded by elements of the right, this kind of language has a definite purpose. It is designed to invoke the hostility and distaste of the newspaper’s upper middle class readers and thereby make it easier for the state to either jail the WikiLeaks founder or kill him.

The other noteworthy byline is that of Steven Erlanger, the newspaper’s London bureau chief and a 30-year veteran of the *Times*. In addition to his reporting duties, Erlanger serves as a governor of the Ditchley Foundation, which organizes Bilderberg-style, closed-door conferences of top state officials and big business figures to discuss strategic issues of concern to US and British imperialism. Other governors include the former head of MI6, the British secret intelligence service, various bank chiefs and the senior director of Goldman Sachs. Honorary governors include former Tory prime ministers David Cameron and John Major. The chairman of the group is Lord (George Islay MacNeill) Robertson, a senior advisor to BP and former secretary general of NATO.

In the kind of secret talks held by the Ditchley Foundation, the subject of how best to dispose of Julian Assange would certainly not be out of place.

That such “journalists” should sit in judgment of Assange, after indicting him, based on no evidence, as an asset of the Kremlin, is an obscenity. Their entire article stands as a devastating self-exposure of an American media that functions as a quasi-official state propaganda organ, mobilized in the buildup to war and in which outright intelligence agents play a decisive role.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**