

Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* fuels the campaign against Julian Assange

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The German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) appeared on Wednesday with a lead and full-page report on Julian Assange aimed at justifying the handing over of the WikiLeaks founder to British and American authorities.

The articles are an amalgam of insinuations, distortions, half-truths, outright lies and scandal-mongering. They seek to distract from the fundamental significance of the case and to stir up prejudices against Assange, who has spent six years in the Ecuadorian embassy in London as a virtual prisoner after exposing US war crimes in the Middle East and international intrigues of the US intelligence services.

If Assange were to walk out of the embassy he would be immediately arrested by the British police and eventually extradited to the US, where he faces imprisonment, torture, and a long trial with a possible sentence of life imprisonment or death by execution. On taking office US Attorney General Jeff Sessions declared Assange's trial for espionage a "priority," while CIA chief Mike Pompeo, who is now US secretary of state, described WikiLeaks as a "non-state hostile intelligence agency."

The arrest of Assange would be a huge blow to international freedom of the press, signalling to any critical journalist that they risk ruining their life, or even face death, for exposing government crimes. The fact that the SZ has joined the campaign against Assange makes clear where the paper stands when it comes to deciding between freedom of expression and the interests of the state.

The same issue of the SZ that agitates against Assange also contains a report on the "Süddeutsche Zeitung Night," which took place in the Berlin Kulturforum the previous day. More than a thousand "old acquaintances" from the government, political

parties, the media and the world of culture chatted through the night eating "risotto, crab sandwiches and pineapple ice."

The report quotes actress Maren Kroymann, who noted, "One greets one another with kisses but is always looking a bit further—because there are people present who were even more important."

A photo shows SZ editor-in-chief Wolfgang Krach rubbing shoulders with German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU). Another photo features Free Democratic Party leader Christian Lindner with Family Minister Jens Spahn (CDU). This incestuous hive of powerbrokers, media personalities and celebrities also included Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) and the leaders of the Green and Left parties. It is therefore not surprising that the SZ dislikes a critical mind like Julian Assange.

The SZ report is based on internal documents of a "European security firm" that has allegedly protected Assange "with a million-dollar surveillance program" paid for by the government of Ecuador. "The time-consuming intelligence operation has been going on for more than five years, costing an average of \$66,000 a month, with the first year alone costing a million dollars," the SZ writes.

In fact, the job of the security firm had more to do with spying on than "protecting" Assange. It monitored "Assange around the clock and meticulously filed reports on his visitors and habits," the SZ reports.

According to the British *Guardian*, which together with the right-wing *Focus Ecuador* website, had access to the "secret records," the security firm installed CCTV cameras throughout the embassy to follow every move made by Assange in the tiny embassy, around the clock for six years. It listed his mood, habits, and sleeping patterns, and recorded each visitor's purpose

of visit, their passport information and arrival and departure times.

“Every month, the security company sent a confidential list of Assange’s visitors to the Ecuadorian president,” the newspaper stated. “Sometimes, the company included stills from secret video footage of interesting guests, plus profiles and analysis.”

Based on this intimate observation of a prisoner who has been cut off from the world—and even the sunlight—for six years and subjected to corresponding mental stress, the SZ defames Assange for acting “strangely” and engaging in “confrontations with the embassy staff,” even to the point of being involved in a “brawl.”

On the pure assumptions of his observers, the paper accuses Assange of penetrating the embassy’s networks and trying to intercept personal communication of embassy workers and possibly the ambassador himself. WikiLeaks has emphatically denied this allegation in a tweet: “That’s an anonymous libel aligned with the current UK-US government onslaught against Mr. Assange’s asylum—while he can’t respond.”

The SZ also claims that Assange has secretly recorded two of his visitors and publishes several pictures from the secret surveillance cameras of the security company. According to the report, one of those secretly recorded is filmmaker Laura Poitras, who, contrary to her original pledge, edited her documentary film on Assange in such a manner as to endanger him.

The SZ article is riddled with allegations by Assange’s political opponents. It accuses former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, who had the audacity to uphold Assange’s democratic rights by offering him protection his country’s embassy, of doing so as “a deliberate provocation” and in order to present himself as a “rebel against US imperialism.”

Commenting on the release of emails from the campaign of the Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, the SZ glibly writes: “Is Julian Assange the man the world has to thank for Trump?” In fact, WikiLeaks revealed how the Democratic National Committee sought to sabotage the candidacy of Clinton’s rival Bernie Sanders, who won the support of millions by describing himself as socialist and denouncing the “billionaire class.” Assange’s website also made public the details of Clinton’s intimate and

lucrative relationship with Wall Street.

One can only conclude from the observations made by the SZ that it would hide from the public similar compromising revelations about the politicians it publicly embraced during the “Night of the Süddeutsche Zeitung.”

The publication of the latest reports and accusations by the SZ and the *Guardian* against Assange increase the risk that he will be delivered into the hands of his persecutors.



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