

New York Times ramps up smear campaign against Julian Assange

Tom Hall

6 November 2018

A pair of blaring headlines appearing in Friday's edition of the *New York Times* purported to show that the newspaper had obtained damning new evidence of collusion between WikiLeaks, the Trump campaign and the Russian government to damage the campaign of Hillary Clinton in 2016.

The latest round of smears appearing in the *Times*, the journalistic mouthpiece of the Democratic Party and sections of the military-intelligence apparatus opposed to Trump, is aimed at preparing public opinion for an eventual indictment on espionage charges of WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange, preparations for which are already in full swing. The *Times* articles appeared amid widespread media speculation that special counsel Robert Mueller could begin handing down indictments soon.

The government of Ecuador, eager to curry favor with Washington, is rapidly moving to expel Assange from its embassy in London, where he has been trapped since he first sought political asylum there in 2012. Assange would be arrested by British police immediately upon setting foot outside the embassy, after which he could be extradited to the United States, where a secret grand jury has reportedly long been convened to hear charges against him.

Consortium News reported on Saturday that Assange was the target of a failed break-in two weeks ago, according to Assange's legal team. While the details of the incident are still unclear, it demonstrates the severity of his situation as well as total abdication by the government of Ecuador of responsibility for Assange's security, which appears to now be virtually nonexistent. Assange apparently was able to foil the intruder only because he had set a booby-trap in his room.

The incident has been totally unreported in the American press more than two days after the story broke.

Last month, a bipartisan group of lawmakers headed by

Democrat Eliot Engel published an open letter to the Ecuadorian government demanding that President Lenin Moreno hand over Assange, branding the WikiLeaks publisher "a dangerous criminal and a threat to global security," who "should be brought to justice."

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) also filed a lawsuit against the Russian government, Trump campaign officials and Assange, alleging collusion between them to sabotage Clinton's election campaign. The lawsuit argues against longstanding US laws and court precedent protecting whistleblowers and investigative journalists by declaring that Assange, by publishing information that the DNC alleged was illegally obtained, was criminally liable.

Both WikiLeaks and Russia have vehemently denied the charges that Russia was the source of e-mails published by WikiLeaks in the weeks before the November election from the DNC and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta. These e-mails contained verification of Clinton's corrupt relationships with Wall Street as well as collusion by the DNC, which had effectively been taken over by the Clinton campaign, to fix the party's primary race in her favor.

A key element in the Democratic Party's narrative of Trump's "collusion" with WikiLeaks, which is the subject of the *Times's* articles, is the role of Republican political consultant Roger Stone, who made public statements supportive of WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of Clinton's private e-mails in the month before the election, and who reached out to figures close to the Trump campaign over the leaked e-mails before they were officially released.

The Democrats and the *Times* allege that Stone functioned as a go-between for the Trump campaign with Assange, and by extension the Russian government, who they claim was the source of the leaked Clinton e-mails. Establishing a connection between Roger Stone, or more accurately fabricating one, is thus critically important for

the campaign against WikiLeaks. Stone himself has repeatedly denied all of the accusations.

The *Times* articles center on e-mail correspondence obtained by the newspaper between Stone and Stephen Bannon, who had left his post as editor of the right-wing *Breitbart News* website to head Trump's election campaign, weeks before the official release of the Clinton e-mails by WikiLeaks. The emails, the newspaper alleges, "show how the political operative Roger J. Stone Jr. sold himself to Trump campaign advisers as a potential conduit to WikiLeaks."

The carefully hedged language used by the authors, to the effect that Stone "sold himself" as a WikiLeaks confidante rather than actually being one, is an implicit admission that the *Times*'s supposedly bombshell revelations amount to nothing. All of the information that Stone passed on to Bannon about WikiLeaks was already publicly available at the time, a fact the authors are compelled to admit parenthetically halfway through their commentary providing "context" for the e-mails.

Stone also related vague, secondhand observations about Assange's security concerns in the Ecuadorian embassy, which are alleged to have come from comedian and WikiLeaks supporter Randy Credico (allegations that Credico has also denied). However, there is no evidence at all that Stone had backchannel access to WikiLeaks representatives, let alone that he was reaching out to Bannon with the authorization of WikiLeaks.

To the extent that there is any substance to the published e-mail exchanges, they suggest the opposite of the core argument that the authors are driving at—that the Trump campaign was colluding through Stone with WikiLeaks. Significantly, the response from Bannon to Stone's overtures was noticeably cool, with Stone complaining to one of Bannon's subordinates, "I'd tell Bannon but he doesn't call me back." When this subordinate reached out to Bannon on Stone's behalf, Bannon responded curtly, "I've got important stuff to worry about."

As with every other article published by the *Times* and the rest of the American media on the allegations of Russian "meddling" in the 2016 elections, last Friday's articles are a travesty of journalism. They are articles written to justify a headline, pieced together through innuendo and parroting the propaganda lies of the Democrats and sections of the intelligence agencies.

The newspaper repeats, as though it was beyond any shadow of a doubt, the unproven allegations that the Russian government was WikiLeaks' source for the Podesta e-mails, and brands the publication of the leaked

documents as an act of political sabotage. "When WikiLeaks published a trove of emails stolen from Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman a month before the 2016 election, it was widely viewed as an attempt to damage her standing... We have since learned that the emails were originally hacked by Russian intelligence operatives."

The authors of the "analysis" article state, "This article is based on interviews with people familiar with the Russia investigation and the inner workings of the Trump campaign." In other words, the article was written with the collaboration and consent of figures in the FBI and the CIA.

By now, a familiar pattern has arisen in the "reporting" on the allegations of Russian hacking. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other major media outlets publish articles with provocative, semi-hysterical headlines that contain zero evidence or are based entirely on the unfounded assertions or "high levels of confidence" of anonymous intelligence officials, in the course of which the authors themselves sometimes quietly admit that nothing has been proven. These unfounded allegations, nonetheless, are repeated again and again by the compliant, corporate-controlled US media as though they were unvarnished fact, cynically assuming (largely incorrectly, as public opinion polls have shown) that the public will be accustomed to accept them as fact as long as they continually assert them to be so.

Taken in context, the *Times*'s articles point to the immediate danger that Julian Assange finds himself in. The working class in the United States and internationally must be mobilized to defend the WikiLeaks founder from the attacks of the American state.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact