

Is the Mueller investigation preparing to indict WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange?

By James Cogan
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The investigation by special counsel and former FBI director Robert Mueller into alleged “Russian interference” in the 2016 US presidential election is close to issuing an indictment against WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange. That is the conclusion that can be drawn from a lengthy article authored by James Gordon Meek and Ali Dukakis and published on August 29 by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC).

James Gordon Meek is not just any journalist. He must be ranked as one of the prime conduits in the American media for the positions of the US intelligence, police and military apparatus. Throughout his now 25-year career, he has been repeatedly used by “unnamed sources” within the state to luridly report on a myriad of purported terrorism conspiracies that have been used to justify the military operations and anti-democratic outrages carried out under the pretext that the US is fighting a “war on terror.” From 2011 to 2013, he worked as the leading “counterterrorism advisor” to the congressional Committee on Homeland Security.

Meek’s attention to the issue of Julian Assange is therefore of significance. The underlying and unsubstantiated premise of the article is that WikiLeaks was part of a conspiracy, involving Russian intelligence and Roger Stone, a person who supported the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, to manipulate the outcome of the US election.

Meek and Dukakis wrote, as fact, that Assange “is embroiled in the global political scandal surrounding Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016 election, with questions about his role in that drama being raised by friends and foes alike.” They asserted: “In more ways than one, the very walls protecting Assange also appear to be closing in.”

The article continued: “Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigators have been probing WikiLeaks’ possible role in Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016

elections, recently questioning at least five witnesses about their contacts with WikiLeaks. If his hosts at the Ecuadorian embassy were to rescind his asylum and evict him, he faces immediate arrest by British authorities for failing to surrender on an arrest warrant related to a since-dropped rape investigation in Sweden. That arrest could pave the way for his potential extradition to the United States, should US officials decide to charge him with a crime while he is in custody.”

It is necessary to review the context in which such a scenario is elaborated.

Due to WikiLeaks’ publication in 2010 of damning exposures of US imperialist war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, followed by its release of US diplomatic cables that revealed the sordid anti-democratic intrigues that Washington conducts around the world, Assange has been subjected to relentless persecution and slander. For over six years, he has been forced to live in the small Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he sought and was granted political asylum on June 19, 2012, under conditions in which he faced extradition to Sweden to answer “questions” over false and manufactured allegations of sexual assault.

Julian Assange did not commit and was never charged with any crime. The only motive behind the Swedish extradition warrant was to render him to a country where he could be rapidly extradited on to the US to face a show trial on false charges of espionage and decades of imprisonment or potentially even a death sentence.

Swedish prosecutors abandoned their fraudulent investigation in May 2017. The determination of the British government to arrest and detain Assange if he sets foot outside the Ecuadorian embassy has ensured that he remains deprived of direct sunlight, adequate medical and dental treatment and social engagement. He endures what a United Nations working group characterised in December 2015 as “arbitrary detention,” “deprivation of

liberty” and “violation of his human rights.”

Since March 28 this year—that is, for over five months—his circumstances have been made even more draconian. As part of its attempts to ingratiate itself with Washington, the Moreno government in Ecuador has turned on Assange. It has stripped him of his right to communicate in any way with the outside world, including with his family in Australia, and to receive any personal visitors apart from his legal representatives.

Meek and Dukakis wrote in their ABC report: “Little is known about how Assange, who friends say is a ‘creature of the Internet,’ has managed his time there, especially since his electronic devices were taken away in March. Visitors have told ABC News he reads, uses a treadmill, and observes the street life below from a window.”

Arguably the most obscene paragraph in the Meek/Dukakis article was the following: “In a series of interviews with his lawyers, supporters and friends, the people closest to Assange painted a bleak picture of his present and a grim outlook on his future, telling ABC News that he may both long for and dread the day he is forced out of the embassy.”

Mouthpieces for the American state effectively gloat over the fact that all people, regardless of how courageous, can be torn down and brought to a psychological or physical breaking point. That is the “grim outlook” they envisage for Julian Assange.

The claim that Assange was part of a conspiracy to manipulate the 2016 US presidential election is based on amalgams, distortions and outright lies.

The accusations centre on the fact that in July 2016, WikiLeaks published a trove of emails from the Democratic National Committee (DNC). In doing so, Assange and his media organisation exposed the fact that the DNC, ostensibly an impartial body, had worked to undermine and sabotage the presidential campaign of self-styled socialist Bernie Sanders and ensure that Hillary Clinton won the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

In October 2016, WikiLeaks followed up with the publication of emails sent by Clinton campaign chairperson John Podesta, which further exposed her as a big business stooge and warmonger.

Those who have joined the denunciations of WikiLeaks for publishing the DNC and Podesta emails generally do not spell out their political standpoint, because it is utterly reactionary. The entire argument that Julian Assange assisted Donald Trump is predicated on the assumption that American workers and young people should have

been denied information about the character of Clinton and her campaign and, in a state of ignorance, elected her as president of the United States.

There is absolutely no evidence that WikiLeaks obtained the DNC and Podesta emails from Russian intelligence agencies, let alone that it conspired with such agencies to hack the DNC. Assange has publicly stated that his source was not Russian-linked. Craig Murray, a British-based whistleblower and prominent WikiLeaks supporter, has stated he knows that the sources of the leaks were “disgruntled” employees of the DNC, who were outraged over its conspiratorial efforts to sabotage the Sanders campaign.

Nor is there any evidence of collusion between Assange and the Trump campaign. WikiLeaks published the DNC emails in July 2016. The first attempt by Trump backer Roger Stone to contact Assange did not take place until August. He sought to reach WikiLeaks through radical American radio presenter Randy Credico, who based on public records of the correspondence, did nothing more than tell Stone to read what the organisation had published.

Moreover, when Stone wrote to Credico, it was more than year after he had been sacked by Trump from his official campaign team.

Every political and media organization that either repeats the slander that WikiLeaks operated on behalf of Russia and Trump, or remains silent as Julian Assange is vilified and set-up for criminal indictment, deserves the utter contempt and condemnation of all defenders of democratic rights and freedom of speech.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is committed to the fight to win the unconditional freedom of Julian Assange. WikiLeaks must be able to continue its groundbreaking journalistic work.

The defence of Assange and WikiLeaks is a crucial part of the broader struggle to defeat the systematic attempts of the ruling class to suppress the ability of independent and critical voices to use the immense democratic potential of the Internet to develop political opposition to war, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights.

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