

CNN peddles intelligence agencies' lies against Assange

By Oscar Grenfell
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CNN published a scurrilous attack against Julian Assange on Monday. Its sole purpose was to revive the discredited claim that the WikiLeaks founder functioned as an “agent” of the Russian government, in order to undermine growing opposition to the US attempts to prosecute Assange for exposing American war crimes and diplomatic conspiracies.

While the article was billed as an “exclusive,” it did not contain any new information. Instead, it recycled innuendos, smears and outright lies that have already been directed against Assange by the intelligence agencies, CNN and the US media.

CNN claims that it commissioned the piece after receiving “exclusive” access to reports filled by UC Global from 2016 and 2017. The private Spanish security firm was hired by the Ecuadorian government to monitor Assange in its London embassy, where he was granted political asylum in 2012.

In reality, the reports have already been covered in far greater detail by the Spanish publication *El Pais* and by other media outlets.

The gratuitous use of the briefings, which apparently covered every aspect of Assange’s personal and professional life in the embassy, is a blatant violation of journalistic ethics and of the right to privacy of an asylee, whose status as a political refugee was repeatedly upheld by the United Nations (UN).

The documents are not being cited to clarify or to provide information in the public interest. Instead, they are being selectively cited to bolster the state persecution of a journalist, through character-assassination and vilification.

The extensive surveillance of Assange in the embassy was being investigated as a potential breach of international law by the UN Special Rapporteur on Privacy, shortly before he was illegally dragged out of the building by British police on April 11.

It is not clear whether UC Global’s briefings are being passed around solely by Western intelligence agencies, in a bid to discredit Assange, or by individuals seeking to cash in on the material. Similar files compiled by an Ecuadorian

firm which replaced UC Global at the embassy in 2017 were used by Spanish criminals earlier this year in an attempt to extort millions of euros from WikiLeaks.

Despite the potentially sensitive nature of the UC Global material, CNN’s article is extraordinarily thin.

Visits to Assange at the embassy by longtime collaborators, along with journalists who happened to be from Russia, and his possession of computing equipment, are presented as iron-clad proof of a vast conspiracy against Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party candidate for the 2016 US presidential election.

The article is based on the claims of the Democratic Party and the US intelligence agencies that material published by WikiLeaks in 2016 was provided by the Russian government. These included leaks of emails from the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and John Podesta, the chairman of Clinton’s campaign, along with secret speeches Clinton had earlier delivered to Wall Street bankers.

The CNN article heavily promotes the report into supposed collusion between the campaign of Donald Trump and Russia, released by US Special Counsel Robert Mueller earlier this year. That report found no evidence of collusion, but repeated the lies that Assange and WikiLeaks had functioned as tools of the Russian state.

CNN does not explain why the WikiLeaks material was so damaging. Instead, it discreetly complains, midway through the article, that the US media documented the leaks, which CNN says included “transcripts of Clinton’s closed-door Wall Street speeches, sniping from staffers about her ‘terrible’ instincts and frustrations about overlap between business and charity, which they dubbed ‘Bill Clinton Inc.’”

In reality, WikiLeaks 2016 publications proved that the DNC had sought to rig the Democratic Party primaries against self-proclaimed “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders, and in favour of Clinton, in contravention of its own rules. They showed that Clinton had promised multi-billionaire bankers that she would govern in their

interests and support more predatory US military interventions.

Documents also established that the Clinton Foundation was a massive cash for access scheme, whereby governments, corporations and individuals would provide sums of money, in return for meetings with the Clintons and other government figures.

At no point does the CNN article refute the fact that this material was newsworthy, in the public interest and true—the fundamental criteria for any genuine publishing organisation.

Instead, it repeats the claim that the documents were hacked and provided by a shadowy online entity known as “Guccifer 2.0.” In fact, Assange had first stated that WikiLeaks had material on the Clinton campaign on June 12, 2016, days before the “Guccifer 2.0” persona emerged.

As some WikiLeaks supporters have said, this suggests that “Guccifer 2.0” may have been concocted by forces within the Democratic Party, or the US state, who were seeking to attribute the release of the damaging material to Russia.

The CNN article also asserts a conspiracy between WikiLeaks and the Russian-owned RT media outlet. It declares that: “On at least two occasions, RT even published articles detailing the new batches of emails before WikiLeaks officially released them, suggesting that they were coordinating behind the scenes, which they deny.”

As RT and others have commented, the Russian broadcaster tweeted about the leaks before the WikiLeaks Twitter account. But the documents had already been publicly released on the WikiLeaks website.

Other assertions in the CNN report are conspicuously threadbare.

It makes much of the fact that German computer expert Andrew Müller-Maguhn visited Assange twelve times in 2016.

The article cites the Mueller report as stating that he “may have assisted with the transfer of these stolen documents to WikiLeaks.” As CNN is compelled to note, however, the reference to Müller-Maguhn in the Mueller report was in the context of its highly conditional and unconvincing statement that it “cannot rule out that stolen documents were transferred to WikiLeaks through intermediaries who visited during the summer of 2016.”

Mueller never questioned Müller-Maguhn, Assange, or any of his associates, including former British diplomat Craig Murray, who have categorically stated that Russia was not the source of the 2016 leaks.

Other portions of the article can only be described as a desperate exercise in mud-smearing. Meetings between Assange and RT journalists are presented as illegitimate,

solely on the grounds that the reporters are from Russia.

CNN declares that “Assange’s authority appeared at times to rival that of the ambassador,” based on UC Global reports concerning former Ecuadorian ambassador to London Juan Falconi.

Falconi, the only person mentioned in the article who agreed to provide comments to CNN, refuted this claim, indicating he was never pressured to give Assange “special treatment and that he had established rules for Assange to follow.” CNN simply moved on to its next slander.

The CNN article is far from the first hit-piece against Assange by the network, which has a documented history of working with the CIA. CNN reporters have previously told their audience that it is “illegal” to read WikiLeaks files. The network also allowed a CIA official to claim, on air, that Assange was a pedophile, without contradicting his wholly made-up and defamatory assertion.

The CNN report demonstrates the support of the Democratic Party and the “liberal” press for the Trump administration’s attempts to extradite Assange to the US. The entire US political establishment welcomes the move to prosecute the WikiLeaks founder on Espionage Act charges that carry a maximum sentence of 175 years imprisonment. This is part of a broader crackdown on democratic rights, aimed at criminalising anti-war sentiment, and creating a precedent for the suppression of all social and political opposition from below.

This shows the critical importance of the call by the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International for the development of a Global Defence Committee to coordinate mass action by the international working class, to defeat the international political conspiracy against Assange, secure his freedom and defend all democratic rights.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>