

New Senate Intelligence Committee volume on “Russian interference” smears WikiLeaks and Julian Assange

By Kevin Reed
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On Tuesday, the bipartisan Senate Select Committee on Intelligence released the declassified version of the fifth and final volume of its report called “Russian Active Measures Campaign and Interference in the 2016 US Elections.” The new 1,000-page volume, which has been heavily redacted during the Intelligence Community (IC) review process like the previous four reports, is subtitled, “Counterintelligence Threats and Vulnerabilities.”

The report reiterates the previous principal findings of the committee investigation, namely, that “the Russian government engaged in an aggressive, multifaceted effort to influence, or attempt to influence, the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.”

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., speaks during a Senate Intelligence Committee nomination hearing. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, Pool)

It appears that no effort has been made—after more than three years of an investigation involving both houses of Congress, a probe by special counsel Robert Mueller and an impeachment of the President of the United States at a cost of tens of millions of dollars—to provide anything fundamentally new to bolster the unproven assertion of Russian interference in 2016 or to address previous refutations of the claim following publication of the other four volumes.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is chaired by Republican Party Senator Marco Rubio of Florida and the vice chair is Democratic Party Senator Mark Warner of Virginia. Rubio issued a statement on the release of the declassified document saying that no evidence was found that “Donald Trump or his campaign colluded with the Russian government to meddle in the 2016 elections.”

The summary of the findings in the fifth volume report says, “the Committee lays out its findings in detail by looking at many aspects of the counterintelligence threat posed by the Russian influence operation.” As with all previous US government investigative documents on the 2016 elections, the Senate report contains an important qualifier: “While the Committee does not describe the final result as a complete picture, this volume provides the most comprehensive description to date of Russia’s activities and the threat they posed.”

It is clear that a primary purpose of the Senate report is to bolster the lie that WikiLeaks and its editor Julian Assange worked directly with operatives within the Trump campaign team to assist Russian intelligence in their supposed manipulation of the 2016 US elections. In developing this elaborate and false narrative, the Senate document mentions WikiLeaks 475 times and Assange 193 times.

Meanwhile, there are two subsections of the document devoted specifically to WikiLeaks: “Russia and WikiLeaks Coordinate On Interference in the U.S. Election” (22 pages) and “Efforts to Capitalize on WikiLeaks, Gain Advance Information on Releases” (38 pages).

The majority of the material dealing with WikiLeaks concerns the online publication of the hacked email messages from the Democratic National Committee in July 2016 just before the Democratic Party National Convention that nominated Hillary Clinton as the party’s candidate for president. While Julian Assange has maintained that the hacked email messages were not provided to WikiLeaks by people with ties to Russian intelligence, this has been persistently

presented as fact by the US government and the corporate media.

The Senate report attempts to draw a straight line between the well-documented record of the political skullduggery of Trump operatives such as Paul Manafort and Roger Stone with the principled publication of the hacked email messages by WikiLeaks. Assange published the DNC messages—which exposed a conspiracy by the Democratic Party National Committee against the campaign of Bernie Sanders and the direct ties between Hillary Clinton and the Wall Street financial oligarchy—because they were of enormous interest and the public had the right to know about them once they were made available to WikiLeaks.

Much of the other “evidence” presented claiming that WikiLeaks collaborated with the Trump campaign or the Russian government is based on previously available public reports and testimony and amounts to the charge of “guilt by association” because the timing of the publication of the hacked DNC email messages was damaging to the Democratic Party’s election campaign.

The vendetta against WikiLeaks is clearly spelled out in the section devoted to the background of the online publication. Quoting from the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, the report says WikiLeaks and its senior leadership “resemble a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors.”

The campaign against WikiLeaks has increasingly been an effort to deny that it is a news publishing organization made up of journalists. The Senate report states: “Although WikiLeaks seeks to portray itself as a legitimate media organization, its disclosures have jeopardized the safety and privacy of individual Americans and foreign allies because WikiLeaks has made only minimal, and sometimes no efforts to redact sensitive information, and does not seem to weigh whether its disclosures add any public interest value.”

Clearly, a primary objective of the Senate report and the US intelligence establishment is to place into the public domain lies that they know will be picked up faithfully by the corporate media and repeated as fact. That this is already happening can be shown by numerous examples over the past 24 hours.

Reuters published a report that says, “Russia used

Republican political operative Paul Manafort and the WikiLeaks website to try to help now-U.S. President Donald Trump win the 2016 election, a Republican-led Senate committee said in its final review of the matter on Tuesday.” A report in the online publication Venture Beat wrote, “The report offers a detailed narrative of how Russian disinformation agencies hacked emails from the Democratic National Committee and fed them to WikiLeaks, which then coordinated their release with the Trump campaign.”

The renewed effort to smear WikiLeaks and connect the publication to unsubstantiated claims of Russian interference in the 2016 elections are part of the ongoing persecution of Julian Assange, who is sitting in a London prison unable to speak in his own defense. As Assange awaits the September 7 resumption of a hearing to have him extradited to the US to face charges under the Espionage Act of 1917, the American political establishment is piling up one lie after another in order to poison public opinion against him.

Class conscious workers and young people around the world must reject the mountain of falsifications being pumped out by every branch of the US government against Julian Assange and WikiLeaks, whose only crime is publishing the truth. The struggle to stop the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States and for his freedom from persecution must be taken up in every workplace, school and neighborhood as part of the struggle of the working class against the entire capitalist system.

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