

Pardoning Julian Assange: Donald Trump, WikiLeaks and the DNC

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The central pillar to Democratic paranoia and vengefulness regarding the loss of Hillary Clinton in 2016 was the link between Russian hacking, the servers of the Democratic National Committee and the release of emails via WikiLeaks. Over time, that account has become a matter of hagiography, an article of faith, with grave conclusions: WikiLeaks and Russia elected Donald Trump.

The Russia-DNC angle received another prod in pre-extradition hearings being conducted against Assange in the Westminster Magistrates Court, with his legal team disclosing details of the visit paid to the WikiLeaks publisher by former California Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (image below) in 2017. The visit in question was not entirely a matter of surprise. The *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) in September that year that Rohrabacher had contacted the White House in an attempt to broker a deal with Assange designed to alleviate his legal troubles. A conversation was said to have taken place between the Congressman and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, canvassing the possibility of ending the impasse in exchange for evidence that Russia was not behind the hacked emails.

Assange's legal team, through Edward Fitzgerald, disclosed that President Trump had instructed Rohrabacher to discuss the possibility of a pardon for Assange provided he agreed to deny any Russian connection in the DNC hack. A [statement](#) produced by Assange's personal lawyer, Jennifer Robison, included the following description:

"Mr Rohrabacher going to see Mr Assange and saying, on instructions from the president, he was offering a pardon or some other way out, if Mr Assange ... said Russia had nothing to do with the DNC leaks."



For his part, former Congressman Rohrabacher is dissembling, claiming he had not discussed Assange with Trump prior to his “fact finding mission” to London. “At no time did I offer Julian Assange anything from the President because I had not spoken with the President about this issue at all.” Rohrabacher admitted to speaking with Kelly in a brief conversation *after* his trip to the Ecuadorean embassy in London. “No one followed up with me including Gen. Kelly and that was the last discussion I had on this subject with anyone representing Trump or his Administration.”

In 2018, Rohrabacher, [in an interview](#) with *The Intercept*, claimed that Kelly blocked him from briefing Trump about his London meeting with Assange. Both the congressman and his travel companion Charles Johnson had been shown “definitive proof [by Assange] that Russia was not the source of the Democratic Party communications that WikiLeaks published during the 2016 campaign.” The reason for Kelly’s obstruction lay with concerns that the special prosecutor might take an interest in Rohrabacher’s discussions about Russia, and how “that would appear to out-of-control prosecutors that that is where the collusion is.”

To keep matters interesting and mendacious, Trump now claims to “barely” know Rohrabacher while White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham [insists](#) that the allegations are “absolutely and completely false”, “a complete fabrication and a total lie. This is probably another never ending hoax and total lie from the DNC.”

In response, WikiLeaks [has stressed that](#),

“Chronology matters: The meeting and the offer were made ten months after Julian Assange had already independently stated Russia was not the source of the DNC publication. The witness statement is one of the many bombshells from the defence to come.”

The latest instalment in the case that keeps giving is a reminder of how trenchantly the Democrats have been seeking to link the DNC hack to Russia, WikiLeaks and their defeat. What Trump and Assange share, on some level, is the same tarnishing administered by the same brush.

In August 2017, Patrick Lawrence, [writing in *The Nation*](#), suggested that the download of the relevant data from the DNC servers was most probably an internal job rather than an externally conducted operation. Reliance was made upon the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity [memorandum to Trump](#) claiming that, “Forensic studies of ‘Russian hacking’ into Democratic National Committee computers last year reveal that on July 5, 2016, data was leaked (not hacked) by a person with physical access to DNC computer.” An “insider” had “copied DNC data onto an external storage device.”

A storm ensued: the article had laid some considerable explosive material under the traditional DNC account, leading to editor Katrina vanden Heuvel to conduct a “post publication review”. In a modest mea culpa, [the editorial board suggested](#) that they “should have made certain that several of the article’s conclusions were presented as possibilities, not as certainties.”

Since then, the [Mueller Report](#) has sought to ensconce the Russia hack-DNC narrative, dismissing Assange’s inside job thesis with almost withering disdain. “As reports attributing the DNC and DCCC hacks to the Russian government emerged, WikiLeaks and Assange made several public statements apparently designed to obscure the source of the material that WikiLeaks was releasing. The file-transfer evidence ... and other information uncovered during the investigation discredit WikiLeaks’s claims about the source of material that it posted.”

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser has yielded to Assange’s team on the material produced at the pre-extradition hearing, potentially linking WikiLeaks to the highest deliberations in the White House. The addition, along with the vast picture of surveillance targeting Assange, has the makings of a very compromising picture, indeed.

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