

Did Trump Offer Assange A ‘Quid Pro Quo’ regarding “Russiagate” and the DNC Troves?

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*A revelation in Westminster Magistrate’s Court on Wednesday sent shockwaves through the mainstream media. It is being widely publicised that in 2017 US **President Donald Trump** offered **Julian Assange** a pardon if he was to declare that Russia had not been the source of the DNC hack, which had exposed emails discrediting then presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton. A lawyer representing Mr Assange, the former Wikileaks editor who faces extradition to the United States, put forward evidence that former US congressman **Dana Rohrabacher** had visited him in the Ecuadorian embassy in 2017, in the early days of Robert Mueller’s investigation into alleged Russian interference in the US election.*

Edward Fitzgerald QC said that the statement from Assange’s lawyer described: “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”. **The deal was allegedly offered a year after Assange published the DNC troves**, which provided insight into the inner workings of the Clinton campaign, and proved highly embarrassing and damaging to the presidential nominee. Clinton allies accused both Wikileaks and Russia at the time of working in cahoots with the Trump campaign.

Although Julian Assange was always reluctant to declare outright that the source was in fact not Russia, due to Wikileaks’ policy of not naming its sources, a visitor to the Edinburgh office of Sputnik news, back in November 2016, did just that. Friend of Assange, Craig Murray, the former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, told journalists that he had recently been to see Assange, who had assured him that the source of the DNC hack was in fact from within [Washington](#). He went further to say that he had met the person responsible for the leak, and that it was someone from within the DNC. The story was then picked up by other news outlets, which spread doubts regarding the Democrats’ claims of Russia being involved in the hack.

Several former US intelligence analysts, including former NSA officer [Bill Binney](#), have also come out publicly and said that the DNC could not have been hacked by Russia, but most likely came from within the DNC itself. A [piece](#) published by Patrick Lawrence titled “A New Report Raises Big Questions about Last Year’s DNC Hack,” also claimed that for technical reasons, the data that was allegedly downloaded to a hacker could not have been done so in the way suggested because it was downloaded at a much faster rate than would have been possible given the technology available to such a hacker at the time. Indeed it has been [said](#) that the data could only have been retrieved internally and loaded onto a device such as a thumb drive.

As for Dana Rohrabacher, he denies offering a 'quid pro quo' to Assange on behalf of Trump. He states on his [website](#): 'I was not directed by Trump or anyone else connected with him to meet with Julian Assange. I was on my own fact finding mission at personal expense...However when speaking with Julian Assange, I told him that if he could provide information and evidence about who actually gave him the DNC emails, I would then call on President Trump to pardon him.' Rohrabacher then says that on his return to the US he called General Kelly to say Assange would be prepared to provide information about the DNC emails in exchange for a pardon. He vouches that he had no further discussions on the matter with anyone from the administration, including President Trump. The White House, for its part, also strongly denies any such offer was made on behalf of Trump. Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham said: 'The President barely knows Dana Rohrabacher other than he's an ex-congressman. He's never spoken to him on this subject or almost any subject...It is a complete fabrication and a total lie.' Whether or not Rohrabacher was indeed acting on behalf of Trump, the emergence of this story can only be of further detriment to both Trump and the bid to extradite Assange.

Julian Assange, who is currently being held in Belmarsh Prison in the UK, is facing 18 charges in the US, none of which are in connection to the DNC hack, but instead concern WikiLeaks's publication of diplomatic cables and files detailing illegal atrocities carried out by the US military in Afghanistan and Iraq and which were provided to Wikileaks by former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning. His extradition hearing is due to start on at Woolwich Crown Court on Monday. There are grave concerns however about the state of Assange's health, with 117 doctors signing an open letter in the medical journal The Lancet this week, calling for an end to what they describe as his 'psychological torture and medical neglect'. They state: 'Should Assange die in a UK prison, as the UN special rapporteur on torture has warned, he will have effectively been tortured to death...The medical profession cannot afford to stand silently by, on the wrong side of torture and the wrong side of history, while such a travesty unfolds.' Recently UK opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn also shared concerns about Assange's plight and called on his extradition to be halted and the European Commissioner for Human Rights on Thursday [announced](#) her opposition to any extradition, citing the 'chilling effect' it would have on media freedom and human rights.

It remains to be seen whether such pleas will fall on deaf ears. But with new questions now being raised as to whether Donald Trump did indeed offer Julian Assange a pardon, the timing of these court revelations is significant. It isn't too much a stretch of the imagination to think that they could impact negatively on the US' extradition case. Boris Johnson will now have to decide whether the UK-US 'special relationship' is indeed worth jeopardising Britain's record on press freedom and human rights.

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