

Trump Claims He Knows “Nothing” About the Julian Assange He Cited Hundreds of Times in His Campaign

Footage of Trump mentioning WikiLeaks and its releases over 140 times in October 2016 alone has since resurfaced, suggesting that Trump’s recent claims of ignorance in regard to Assange and WikiLeaks are insincere at best.

By [Whitney Webb](#)

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President Donald Trump told a reporter outside the White House on Tuesday that he doesn’t “know anything” about WikiLeaks founder and former editor Julian Assange, whose political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London is believed to be under threat largely from pressure by the U.S. government.

Trump’s statements have been [widely criticized](#) as hypocritical, given that he heavily promoted WikiLeaks’ release of emails from the Democratic National Committee and former Hillary Clinton campaign chair John Podesta in the months and weeks prior to the October 2016 presidential election.

Trump claimed to know very little about Assange or his increasingly precarious situation when a reporter had asked him “Should Julian Assange go free?”

The question was a likely response to the recent news that the Department of Justice was [set to indict](#) Assange with the intent of immediately prompting his extradition, as well as the apparently accidental revelation that the DOJ has [a sealed indictment](#) waiting for Assange should he ever be extradited to the United States.

President Trump is asked, “Should Julian Assange go free?”

Trump: “I don’t know anything about him. Really. I don’t know much about him. I really don’t.” pic.twitter.com/3RT12rAaB9

— Andrew Blake (@apblake) [November 20, 2018](#)

I don’t know the guy, I just used him to get elected

In response to a question on whether Assange should be prosecuted or not, Trump responded that

“I don’t know anything about him. Really. I don’t know much about him. I really don’t.”

However, [footage of Trump](#) mentioning WikiLeaks and its releases over 140 times in October 2016 alone has since resurfaced, suggesting that Trump's recent claims of ignorance in regard to Assange and WikiLeaks are insincere at best.

While Trump heavily promoted WikiLeaks prior to winning the 2016 election, his administration has since taken an aggressive stance towards WikiLeaks and Assange as well as towards government whistleblowers and leakers.

For example, Jeff Sessions, the former attorney general who was forced to resign earlier this month, had stated last year that Assange's arrest was a "[priority](#)." The Trump administration's aggressive pursuit of Assange has also been revealed by statements made by top administration officials such as [current Secretary of State and former CIA Director Mike Pompeo](#) and [Vice President Mike Pence](#) as well as [several U.S. senators](#), among [other important figures](#) in the Washington political establishment. Yet Trump himself has largely avoided speaking publicly about the matter, as his recent response to a direct question about Assange's fate reveals.

Treating whistleblowers as criminals

Aside from WikiLeaks, the Trump administration has also pursued draconian sentences against alleged whistleblowers. For instance, whistleblowers Reality Winner and Terry Albury were given lengthy prison sentences for providing information to [the same online publication](#), *The Intercept*. Winner [was given](#) five years and three months in prison while Albury [was sentenced](#) to four years.

Both had been charged under the Espionage Act, a practice regularly adopted by the Obama administration in its pursuit of whistleblowers. However, the prison sentences sought by the Trump administration have been much more draconian than those previously handed out under Obama's tenure. Indeed, Winner's sentence is [the longest sentence ever](#) given for an unauthorized disclosure to the media in U.S. history.

If Assange were extradited to the U.S. and indicted, it is likely that he too would be charged under the Espionage Act, as WikiLeaks [recently suggested](#) on Twitter.

U.S. government efforts to charge Assange under the Espionage Act long precede Trump's tenure as president, as the existence of a sealed indictment targeting Assange was "[unofficially](#)" [revealed](#) after WikiLeaks released emails from the U.S.-based private intelligence company Stratfor.

Fred Burton, Stratfor's Vice-President for Counterterrorism and Corporate Security and former State Department official, [wrote in a 2011 email](#) that "Not for Pub — We have a sealed indictment on Assange. Pls protect." In a separate email from that same year, Burton had written "Assange is going to make a nice bride in prison. Screw the terrorist. He'll be eating cat food forever." The emails had been written just a few months before Assange began his extended stay in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he has remained since 2012 in an effort to avoid extradition to the United States.

Putting the squeeze on Ecuador

However, the Trump administration has placed enormous political and economic pressure

on Ecuador in an effort to force the country to withdraw its political asylum of Assange, who recently was granted Ecuadorian citizenship. Despite the fact that Ecuador's current president, Lenín Moreno, has [sought to increase](#) U.S. influence within the country, he has been unable to rescind Assange's asylum, partially due to the fact that Assange is a citizen of Ecuador.

As a result, Moreno [cut off](#) Assange's internet access and barred his access to visitors aside from his legal team, beginning in late March. Former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa has called the way Assange has been treated by the Moreno-led government akin to "[torture](#)" and has claimed that Moreno's government is trying to make Assange's time at the embassy so miserable that he will choose to leave of his own accord.

While Trump may now claim ignorance of the situation, he will eventually be forced to take a side, if and when the U.S. government succeeds in its long-standing efforts to extradite and prosecute the well-known journalist. Given that top officials in his administration have applied extreme pressure to Ecuador in order to endanger Assange's asylum and have called Assange's arrest a "priority," it's not hard to see what side Trump will eventually back when push comes to shove.

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