

# Floating around

## The Trump administration's attempts to influence Julian Assange

### Nick Must

**A**t one of the recent hearings related to Julian Assange's possible extradition to the U.S., the lead barrister for the defence made the 'extraordinary claim' that, in August of 2017, President Donald Trump had offered an amnesty to the Wikileaks founder.<sup>1</sup> This offer was conditional on Assange making a public announcement to the effect that the Russian state had not been involved in the, now infamous, DNC emails hack.

The conduit for this remarkable offer, the defence further alleged, was the politician formerly known as 'Putin's best friend in Congress',<sup>2</sup> Dana Rohrabacher (the Republican Party's ex-Representative for California's 48th district). This prompted an immediate statement from Rohrabacher, claiming that it had all been his own idea:

'At no time did I talk to President Trump about Julian Assange. Likewise, 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 to find out information I thought was important to our country. I was shocked to find out that no other member of Congress had taken the time in their official or unofficial capacity to interview Julian Assange. 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. However, when speaking with Julian Assange, I told him that if he could provide me information and evidence about who actually gave him the DNC emails, I would then call on President Trump to pardon him. At no time did I offer a deal made by the President, nor did I say I was representing the President. Upon my return, I spoke briefly with Gen. Kelly. I told him that Julian Assange would provide information about the purloined DNC emails in exchange for a pardon. 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 in his Administration.'<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/rme7q77>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/19/donald-trump-offered-julian-assange-pardon-russia-hack-wikileaks>>

<sup>2</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/r89wa8x>> or <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/11/12/a-not-so-fond-farewell-to-dana-rohrabacher-putins-best-friend-in-congress/>>

<sup>3</sup> See 'My Meeting with Julian Assange': <<https://www.rohrabacher.com/news/my-meeting-with-julian-assange>>

This statement is actually full of holes and worthy of careful analysis:

- 1) 'At no time did I talk to President Trump about Julian Assange.' This would imply that a third-party cut out was used.
- 2) Likewise, 'I was not directed by Trump or anyone else connected with him to meet with Julian Assange.' This is not a statement that either Trump or anyone from his administration *disapproved*. Rohrabacher may have suggested he'd meet with Assange and the reply came back, 'Please do!'
- 3) '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.' If Rohrabacher had been told by a third party that Trump was offering a pardon, Rohrabacher could claim that the offer had not come to him *from* Trump.
- 4) 'However, when speaking with Julian Assange, I told him that if he could provide me information and evidence about who actually gave him the DNC emails, I would then call on President Trump to pardon him.' Why would Rohrabacher do this unless he had received some level of certainty beforehand that a pardon *was* possible?
- 5) 'At no time did I offer a deal made by the President, nor did I say I was representing the President.' As per 3 above, this still does not rule out the possibility that the offer came via a third party.
- 6) '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 in his Administration.' Note, please, that this was not 'the only discussion' (which is what one would expect from the tone of Mr Rohrabacher's hands-off statement) but 'the last discussion' surely indicating that there must have been previous ones. The logical implication is that, after he'd met with Assange, Rohrabacher was considered burnt and of no further use.

## **Enter international man of mystery, Nigel Farage**

**A**nother notable visitor of Julian Assange's in 2017 was Nigel Farage. On Thursday 9 March of that year, Farage was seen leaving the Ecuadorian embassy. A BuzzFeed reporter had been tipped off about the surreptitious visit and accosted Farage at the scene, asking him if he'd been to see Assange. However, 'Farage said he couldn't remember what he had been doing in the building.'<sup>4</sup>

That was a ridiculous claim and he obviously had something to hide. Latterly, Farage has admitted he did meet with Assange on that day (and *only* on that day). He has also resolutely denied the claim, made by Fusion GPS

---

<sup>4</sup> <<https://www.buzzfeed.com/marieleconte/wait-what>>

founder Glenn Simpson, that he (Farage) met Assange on other occasions 'and that he provided data to Julian Assange' in the form of 'a thumb drive'.<sup>5</sup>

I believe Farage's denial that he provided any data to Assange. I'd expect that any conduit of hacked info would need to have a technical conversation with Assange and I just can't see Farage being that person. I also believe Farage's assertion that he had not made any other visits to the Ecuadorian Embassy. There had already been media coverage, in 2015, that used leaked visitor logs from the Embassy – and other Ecuadorian government information – to paint a picture of Julian Assange's life under effective house arrest.<sup>6</sup> I'm sure Nigel Farage would have been aware of the immense risk of lying if he *had* actually made any previous visits.

The question remains, however, why was Farage *really* visiting Assange on 9th March 2017? Farage was accompanied on the visit by a senior LBC staffer and he (Farage) has said they were seeing Assange regarding the possibility of an interview on Farage's LBC radio show. But that's not anything that couldn't have been arranged on the phone or via email. I think the likely reason for a *physical visit* is that Farage was acting as a preliminary conduit, assessing the reaction to someone so closely connected with Trump.

Also, if Farage denied the 9 March visit was to hand over a thumb drive with any hacked data on it, then he'd be telling the truth. Not only was it nine months after the release of the DNC material and two days after Wikileaks commenced the 'Vault 7' releases, but it would be *especially* true if it was a thumb drive that actually had something else on it. There the possibilities are virtually endless. Although I think he's a hapless fruitcake, I can more see Farage understanding the importance of not losing a thumb drive with (e.g.) a form of *money on it*<sup>7</sup> than a thumb drive with (what would be to him) ostensibly valueless data.

Either way, what emerges here is a pattern of one-time visits by persons considered to be close to President Trump. Both Nigel Farage and Dana Rohrabacher might be considered, in intelligence terms, as 'floaters' – assets

---

<sup>5</sup> The allegation of a longer term association betwixt Farage and Assange was made by Simpson in testimony before the U.S. House intelligence committee on 14 November 2017. See p. 101 of the document at <<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4355529-TranscriptFusion.html>>. For Farage's denial, see <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-42749306>>.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, <<https://tinyurl.com/yc6nfjtr>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/18/rt-journalists-visited-julian-assange-ecuador-embassy-london>> and <<https://www.buzzfeed.com/jamesball/mr-white-and-mr-blue>>.

<sup>7</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/sym7ujj>> or <<https://www.premiumusb.com/blog/guide-to-storing-bitcoin-and-cryptocurrencies-on-usb-devices>> shows how bitcoin can be stored on a USB thumbdrive.

At that time Assange, through donations to Wikileaks, already had access to a significant sum in Bitcoin – a sum that is worth 'around \$37 million at today's exchange rates'. See <<https://tinyurl.com/wd4vd3u>> or <<https://news.bitcoin.com/wikileaks-gathers-37m-in-btc-since-2010-over-400k-sent-after-julian-assanges-arrest/>>.

or agents used on an informal basis, usually for a one-off occasion.<sup>8</sup> I see an amusing irony in Mr Farage and Mr Rohrabacher (both of whom are often described as 'anti-elite', yet are so obviously a part of the elite) being associated with such a term.

## **Banks hacked**

Although Arron Banks is now seemingly unwilling to touch Nigel Farage with anyone's barge pole,<sup>9</sup> they were previously the archetypal bosom buddies. In November of last year Banks suffered the ignominy of having his mobile phone hacked – with the miscreants responsible then making the archive of his private messages on Twitter publicly available.<sup>10</sup>

Writing for *The Daily Beast*, Nico Hines has speculated that Banks' private messages showed indications of a more extensive Farage-Assange relationship<sup>11</sup> but I am not so convinced. I have been unable to see anything other than the kind of 'banter' one has come to expect from Banks.

The chronology of the Wikileaks releases, Farage's visit and the hacked DMs from Banks' twitter account (participants are AB=Arron Banks / MH=Marina Hyde / RT=Richard Tice, at the time, co-founder with Banks of Leave.EU / RE=Richard Edwards, a friend of Banks from Bristol) goes thus:

### March 7

Wikileaks release 'Vault 7: CIA Hacking Tools #1'.<sup>12</sup>

### March 9

Farage visits Assange at the Ecuadorian Embassy.

### March 10

[*Early morning*]

*The Guardian* publishes a piece by Marina Hyde titled 'With Farage, Assange and Trump, who needs political satire?'<sup>13</sup> The sub-heading, 'What synchronicity: a WikiLeaks dump, helpful to Trump, in the same week as a

---

<sup>8</sup> As given by Richard Bennett in his *Espionage: Spies and Secrets* (London: Virgin Books, 2002): 'a FLOATER: A freelance agent used for a one-off or occasional intelligence operation. Usually a low-level operative such as a taxi-driver, waiter or similar.' [Emphasis added.]

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance: 'Election 2019: Arron Banks tells Leavers to ditch Nigel Farage and back Tories', *The Times*, 11 November 2019 at <<https://tinyurl.com/rc3l8j4>> or <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/election-2019-arron-banks-tells-leavers-to-ditch-nigel-farage-and-back-tories-9gbltkz5c>>.

<sup>10</sup> <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50474626/>>

<sup>11</sup> <<https://tinyurl.com/rb9maon>> or <<https://www.thedailybeast.com/man-who-bankrolled-brexit-boasted-of-wikileaks-backchannel>>

<sup>12</sup> For background to the trial of ex-CIA systems administrator Joshua Schulte, who was accused of being responsible for the leak, see <[https://www.theregister.co.uk/2020/03/05/cia\\_leak\\_trial/](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2020/03/05/cia_leak_trial/)>. For similar on the outcome see <[https://www.theregister.co.uk/2020/03/09/cia\\_hacking\\_trial\\_verdict/](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2020/03/09/cia_hacking_trial_verdict/)>.

<sup>13</sup> <<https://preview.tinyurl.com/hjdpjb7>> or <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/10/farage-assange-trump-wikileaks-ecuador-embassy>>

meeting at Ecuador's embassy in London', would seemingly imply there was some link between Farage and the Wikileaks data release that week – but that can't be true, as the 'Vault 7' release was two days before Farage set foot in the Ecuadorian embassy. (N.B. that Arron Banks was gently lampooned in part of Marina Hyde's article.)

*[Late evening]*

*Twitter group messages*

*Timed at 21:41:54: RT to MH & AB*

'Another gem Marina [i.e. her *Guardian* piece, earlier that day] very very funny – we are in the US next week but when we are back lunch is on us.'

*Timed at 21:47:20: AB to MH & RT*

'Yes, you will have plenty of new material soon! Wiki leaks specialise'

Twitter 1-2-1 messages

*Timed at 22:01:07: RE to AB*

'Don't think we can help old wonky jaw' [a ref. to Douglas Carswell]

<https://t.co/oHShAT3UCw> [this link was to a tweet from Banks about who might be in need of the application of 'depth electrodes']

*Timed at 22:03:18: AB to RE*

'Lol . . . I had a drink with Nigel. He had an interesting time with Wiki leaks. . .' [The use of 'had' here would imply that, having been caught by BuzzFeed, Farage would not be visiting Assange again.]

*Timed at 22:07:25: RE to AB*

'Looking forward to when they publish evidence of Tory hacking/infiltrating other parties . . . Only a matter of time. #deepstate'

March 11

*Twitter group messages*

*Timed at 08:07:37 AB to MH & RT*

'I'm a big fan of Marina work but somehow the latest one didn't work very well. Wasn't as funny! A'

[Presumably Banks had now actually read Marina Hyde's piece from the day before; there's no Hyde piece in the *Guardian* archive for 11 March.]

*Timed at 08:18:49 MH to AB & RT*

'Hahahahaha My apologies. Either way I suspect lunch will be HIGHLY amusing. Have fun in the States guys xxxx'

*Timed at 08:22:51 AB to MH & RT*

'We will, it's going to be bigly!'

*Timed at 08:23:50 AB to MH & RT*

'Ps I'm standing against old wonky jaw [i.e. Douglas Carswell] in Clacton, make Clacton Great Again, rebuild the sea wall and the conservatives will pay!

March 23

Wikileaks release 'Vault 7: CIA Hacking Tools #2'

Late March through early April, Wikileaks continues 'Vault 7 releases'.

## **Truth and consequences**

Putting everything together, what conclusion can be drawn? It is certainly true that in spite of their best efforts to explain away the meetings with Julian Assange, both Dana Rohrabacher and Nigel Farage still have questions to answer about their possible actions as conduits from President Donald Trump. However much Trump wanted Julian Assange to tell the world that Russian state operatives were not responsible for the DNC hack, that has singularly failed to happen. The consequences of this for Assange are clear: the threat of extradition continues and at time of writing he remains incarcerated at Belmarsh prison.