

DID WIKILEAKS DO US INTELLIGENCE BIDDING IN PUBLISHING THE SYRIA FILES?

Consider this nutty data point: between CNN's Reliable Sources and NBC's Meet the Press, Julian Assange was on more Sunday shows today than John McCain, with two TV appearances earlier this week.

Sadly, even in discussions of the potential that the DNC hack-plus-publication amounts to tampering with US elections, few seem to understand that evidence at least suggests that Wikileaks – not its allegedly Russian source – determined the timing of the release to coincide with the Democratic National Convention. Guccifer 2, at least, was aiming to get files out earlier than Wikileaks dumped them. So if someone is tampering, it is Julian Assange who, I've noted, has his own long-standing gripes with Hillary Clinton (though he disclaims any interest in doing her harm). If his source is Russia, that may just mean they had mutual interest in the publication of the files; but Assange claims to have determined the timing.

Since Wikileak's role in the leak has been downplayed even as Assange has made the media rounds, since the nation's spooks claim that *publishing these documents* is what makes it different, I want to consider this exchange Assange had with Chuck Todd:

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Let me ask you this. Do you, without revealing your source on this, do you accept information and leaked documents from foreign governments?

JULIAN ASSANGE:

Well, our publishing model means that what we publish is guaranteed to be

true. That's what we're concerned about. That's what our readers are concerned about. That's the right of the general public, to not—

[snip]

CHUCK TODD:

Does that not trouble you at all, if a foreign government is trying to meddle in the affairs of another foreign government?

JULIAN ASSANGE:

Well, it's an interesting speculative question that's for the press and others to perhaps—

CHUCK TODD:

That doesn't bother you? That is not part of the WikiLeaks credo?

JULIAN ASSANGE:

Well, it's a meta story. *If you're asking would we accept information from U.S. intelligence that we had verified to be completely accurate, and would we publish that, and would we protect our sources in U.S. intelligence, the answer is yes, of course we would.* [my emphasis]

Sure, at one level this is typical Assange redirection. When Todd asked if he'd accept files from Russia, Assange instead answered that he would accept them from the United States.

But it may not be so farcical as it seems. Consider the case of the Syria Files Wikileaks posted in spring 2012, at the beginning of the time the US was engaging in covert operations in Syria. They contained embarrassing information on Bashar al-Assad, his wife, and close associates, as well as documents implicating western companies that had facilitated Assad's repression. Even at the time, people asked if

the files were a western intelligence pys-op, though they were explicitly sourced to various factions of Anonymous. Then, between Jeremy Hammond and Sabu's sentencing processes, it became clear that in January 2012, the latter identified targets for Anonymous hackers, targets that include the Syrian government.

An informant working for the F.B.I. coordinated a 2012 campaign of hundreds of cyberattacks on foreign websites, including some operated by the governments of Iran, Syria, Brazil and Pakistan, according to documents and interviews with people involved in the attacks.

Exploiting a vulnerability in a popular web hosting software, the informant directed at least one hacker to extract vast amounts of data – from bank records to login information – from the government servers of a number of countries and upload it to a server monitored by the F.B.I., according to court statements.

[snip]

The sentencing statement also said that Mr. Monsegur directed other hackers to give him extensive amounts of data from Syrian government websites, including banks and ministries of the government of President Bashar al-Assad. "The F.B.I. took advantage of hackers who wanted to help support the Syrian people against the Assad regime, who instead unwittingly provided the U.S. government access to Syrian systems," the statement said.

What's not known (as multiple reports say is still not known about the DNC hack) is whether the specific files the Sabu-directed Anonymous hackers obtained were the same ones that Wikileaks came to publish, though the timing

certainly works out. It's a very distinct possibility. In which case Assange's comment may be more than redirection, but instead a reminder that Wikileaks has played the analogous role in US-directed hack-and-publish operation, one designed to damage Assad and his western allies. If those documents did ultimately come via FBI direction of Sabu, then Assange might be warning US spooks that their own similar actions could be exposed if he were asked to reveal more about any Russian role in the DNC hack.