

# Ecuador President Threatens to Decide Assange's Fate Over Scandal

Ecuador's president is threatening to soon decide on Julian Assange's refuge after his government falsely accused WikiLeaks of publishing files about a scandal that threatens to bring the president down, as Elizabeth Vos reports.

By [Elizabeth Vos](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno [said](#) Tuesday he would decide “in the short term” the fate of Julian Assange after claiming that WikiLeaks had “repeatedly violated” the terms of Assange's asylum in Ecuador's London embassy by commenting on a scandal linking a Panamanian investment company with Moreno and his family.

Those conditions, or [protocol](#), were imposed by Ecuador on Assange in March 2018 and bar him from commenting publicly on political matters in exchange for being allowed to remain a refugee in the embassy. Assange never agreed to the protocol, which contradicts international refugee law guaranteeing freedom of expression. In addition there is no protocol on WikiLeaks, which still has a working Twitter account.

“Ecuador's President Lenin Moreno stated today that Assange has ‘violated the ‘conditions’ of his asylum’ and that he will ‘take a decision’ ‘in the short term’ after [@WikiLeaks](#) reported on the existence of the [#INAPapers](#) offshore corruption scandal wracking his government,” WikiLeaks tweeted Tuesday.

WikiLeaks had reported about the scandal allegedly involving Moreno and his family with INA Investments Corp, though WikiLeaks has not published any documents related to the case. Moreno's spokesman, however, has implied that WikiLeaks has. A search of Wikileaks' website shows no such files.

According to [Telesur English](#) the scandal came to light in February when Ecuadorian legislator Ronny Aleaga told reporters he had "received a dossier anonymously filled with documents that will implicate Lenin Moreno and his family in alleged crimes of corruption, perjury and money laundering." The dossier has come to be known as the INA Papers.

The story was first reported by the Ecuadorian news outlet [La Fuente](#) in an article titled: "The Offshore Labyrinth of the Presidential Circle." Ecuadorian [media](#) reported that the attorney general's office has initiated a preliminary investigation and that Aleaga would be summoned on Thursday to "give his version and acknowledge his complaint."

The president of the National Assembly, Elizabeth Cabezas, has also come under investigation after allegedly trying to prevent an investigation into the scandal, the state-owned [El Universo](#) newspaper reported.

## **Blaming WikiLeaks**

The embattled Moreno has lashed out at WikiLeaks and Assange.

"Ecuador's Presidential spokesman claimed last night that Maduro, Assange and the country's opposition leader, @MashiRafael are trying to bring down the government, after

an embarrassing offshore and lavish spending scandal [ @INAPapers / #INAPapers ] arose,” WikiLeaks tweeted last week.

The Ecuadorian newspaper [el Telegrafo](#) reported:

“The Australian founded the WikiLeaks portal, which in the last days broadcast press releases and images of the private life of President Lenin Moreno. The leaks made by WikiLeaks on electronic communications of the president Lenin Moreno will motivate legal actions, on the international level, against the directors of said website, as announced by the Chancellor of Ecuador José Valencia.”

Moreno appears to have attempted to deflect from the growing scandal by using it as a pretext to blame WikiLeaks and expel Assange.

The former consul at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, [Fidel Narvaez](#), countered Moreno’s [accusation](#) by saying that WikiLeaks never published the INA Papers, but merely tweeted about the subject.

Narvaez wrote:

“It is absurd that the government of Lenin Moreno intends to link Assange with publications of pages totally unrelated to Wikileaks, or with contents of the New York Times, and it would be ridiculous for the prosecution to investigate a “leak” that does not exist, but only in the false news published by the newspaper that you [Lenin Moreno] direct.”

He added: “Exactly one year ago, the government of Lenin Moreno has isolated Julian Assange in a regime that is almost a prison, who since then has not issued a single tweet. The government is looking for a pretext to end Julian’s asylum and prepares the conditions to subject the country to historical humiliation.”

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In a separate article, translated electronically, Narvaez argued: “Despite being an outrageous accusation, the farce has gone so far that the Ecuadorian National Assembly has issued a resolution to investigate Julian and that it emboldens the government to take measures to ‘Protect national interests.’ In short, the government seeks a false pretext to end the asylum and protection of Julian Assange.”

Attorney and author Eva Golinger, a Latin America analyst, also wrote via Twitter (translated electronically): “This [accusation] is completely false. Wikileaks did not leak any document about the corruption of Lenin Moreno. They only sent a tweet referring to the evidence about the illicit actions of Lenin that had been published by other media. Blaming Assange is irresponsible.”

Golinger added in a separate tweet: “These false accusations are part of @Lenin’s efforts to justify the illegal rendition of Julian Assange to the United States. Since there is no legal basis for doing so, they are making things up. Dangerous, irresponsible and an abuse of human rights.”

Moreno’s accusations were echoed by major Ecuadorian news outlets such as el Telegrafo, which reported that Ecuador’s secretary of communication had accused Venezuela’s President

Nicolas Maduro of “financing the attacks of Julian Assange, to end the peace of Ecuador and the region, and even links the former Ecuadorian president in the plan.”

Last December, the [The New York Times](#) reported that in May 2017, Paul Manafort flew to Ecuador for negotiations with President Moreno, during which Moreno discussed handing over Assange in exchange for “concessions like debt relief from the United States.” The *Times* quoted “three people familiar with the talks, the details of which have not been previously reported.”

Assange sought and received asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in June 2012. He fears that if he leaves the embassy he will be arrested for skipping bail and extradited to the United States for publishing classified documents. Under the previous government of President Rafael Correa, the Ecuadorian government was largely supportive of Assange, an attitude that has shifted markedly under Moreno.

The INA Papers scandal has continued to weaken the [already-unpopular](#) Moreno government. Correa [tweeted](#) (translated electronically) on Sunday: “The end has arrived! There is despair in Carondelet [presidential palace]. In a matter of hours, Moreno will try to leave because of ‘health’ issues. The reality: he knows he is guilty. We have shown who the corrupt were always. I only apologize for trusting this rascal.”

**Elizabeth Vos is a freelance journalist and contributor to Consortium News.**

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## We Were Right on Russia-gate; Now Help Us Keep Our Work Going

For more than two years, led by our founding editor, Bob Parry, *Consortium News* consistently challenged the Russia-gate “collusion” story, which has now been officially dismissed. Please support us to keep our record of unique journalism going as we launch our annual Spring Fundraising Drive today.

**A**aron Maté, one of the leading, independent journalists who debunked the Russia-gate collusion “scandal” tweeted last week:

The late, legendary Robert Parry's contribution at [@Consortiumnews](#) has gone seriously under-appreciated. He & Greenwald both pushed back right from the start. I joined in many months later, inspired by both of them. <https://t.co/zC9pbi6qq7>

– Aaron Maté (@aaronjmate) [March 27, 2019](#)

Indeed, Parry blazed the trail of Russia-gate skepticism on this trail-blazing website he founded in 1995, very likely the first independent news website in history. Following his long experience as an investigative reporter at the Associated Press and *Newsweek* magazine, Bob simply applied

professional journalistic standards and ethics to every story he ever covered. The Russia-gate saga was no different. Some people call it “evidence-based” journalism, or even “scientific” journalism. Bob would have called it just journalism.

Being devoid of ideology or partisan bias, Bob covered the Russia-gate story by demanding evidence, and when none was found he said so. When the corporate media became unmoored in reporting this story, Bob also said so, pointing out how the media had abandoned the bedrock principles of journalism, which begins with skepticism. He set the story in its geo-political and domestic contexts, pointing out how dangerous the wild speculation masquerading as fact was to a world still at risk of nuclear conflict between Russia and the United States.

Depends on what your definition of ‘from the start’ is. Parry was one of the very few tracking the larger propaganda campaign of anti Russian hysteria since Ukraine in 2014. Most people only jumped on after the 2016 election, after the overall narrative had been building for 2yrs

– Robbie Martin (@FluorescentGrey) [March 27, 2019](#)

As he had been in skeptically reporting the WMD fiasco that led to the disastrous invasion of Iraq, Bob was attacked, this time for being a Kremlin stooge, a Putin puppet, and a Trump supporter, simply for keeping his head and doing his job. Bob was soon joined by other writers at **Consortium News** in making this website a leading publication in factual reporting about the burgeoning “scandal.” Some publications or online video sites had one or two skeptical writers or presenters.

But Bob made *Consortium News* a welcoming place for a host of experienced writers who took apart various aspects of the collusion conspiracy theory, including Ray McGovern, Gareth Porter, Daniel Lazare, Patrick Lawrence and Joe Lauria. *Consortium News* is also the exclusive home of the Veterans Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, who published a series of groundbreaking memos challenging the Russia-gate story.

*Consortium News* pays its writers for their excellent work and is exclusively reader-supported. We depend on our audience to keep us going, so that when the dominant corporate media next tries to lead millions of Americans and people around the world astray, we'll be there to set the record straight.

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Consortium News' Record on Russia-gate—How CN Covered the 'Scandal': No. 4—'The Democratic Money Behind Russia-



gate’

As Russia-gate continues to buffet the Trump administration, we now know that the “scandal” started with Democrats funding the original dubious allegations of Russian interference, wrote Joe Lauria on Oct. 29, 2017.

## **The Democratic Money Behind Russia-gate**

**By Joe Lauria**

*Special to Consortium News*

The two sources that originated the allegations claiming that Russia meddled in the 2016 election – without providing convincing evidence – were both *paid for* by the Democratic National Committee, and in one instance also by the Clinton campaign: the Steele dossier and the CrowdStrike analysis of the DNC servers. Think about that for a minute.

We have long known that the DNC did not allow the FBI to examine its computer server for clues about who may have hacked it – or even if it was hacked – and instead turned to CrowdStrike, a private company co-founded by a virulently anti-Putin Russian. Within a day, CrowdStrike blamed Russia on dubious evidence.

And, it has now been disclosed that the Clinton campaign and the DNC paid for opposition research memos written by former British MI6 intelligence agent Christopher Steele using hearsay accusations from anonymous Russian sources to claim that the Russian government was blackmailing and bribing Donald Trump in a scheme that presupposed that Russian

President Vladimir Putin foresaw Trump's presidency years ago when no one else did.

Since then, the U.S. intelligence community has struggled to corroborate Steele's allegations, but those suspicions still colored the thinking of President Obama's intelligence chiefs who, according to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, "hand-picked" the analysts who produced the Jan. 6 "assessment" claiming that Russia interfered in the U.S. election.

In other words, possibly all of the Russia-gate allegations, which have been taken on faith by Democratic partisans and members of the anti-Trump Resistance, trace back to claims paid for or generated by Democrats.

If for a moment one could remove the sometimes justified hatred that many people feel toward Trump, it would be impossible to avoid the impression that the scandal may have been cooked up by the DNC and the Clinton camp in league with Obama's intelligence chiefs to serve political and geopolitical aims.

Absent new evidence based on forensic or documentary proof, we could be looking at a partisan concoction devised in the midst of a bitter general election campaign, a manufactured "scandal" that also has fueled a dangerous New Cold War against Russia; a case of a dirty political "opportunity" serving American ruling interests in reestablishing the dominance over Russia that they enjoyed in the 1990s, as well as feeding the voracious budgetary appetite of the Military-Industrial Complex.

Though lacking independent evidence of the core Russia-gate

allegations, the “scandal” continues to expand into wild exaggerations about the impact of a tiny number of social media pages suspected of having links to Russia but that apparently carried very few specific campaign messages. (Some pages reportedly were devoted to photos of puppies.)

### **‘Cash for Trash’**

Based on what is now known, Wall Street buccaneer Paul Singer paid for GPS Fusion, a Washington-based research firm, to do opposition research on Trump during the Republican primaries, but dropped the effort in May 2016 when it became clear Trump would be the GOP nominee. GPS Fusion has strongly denied that it hired Steele for this work or that the research had anything to do with Russia.

Then, in April 2016 the DNC and the Clinton campaign paid its Washington lawyer Marc Elias to hire Fusion GPS to unearth dirt connecting Trump to Russia. This was three months before the DNC blamed Russia for hacking its computers and supposedly giving its stolen emails to WikiLeaks to help Trump win the election.

“The Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee retained Fusion GPS to research any possible connections between Mr. Trump, his businesses, his campaign team and Russia, court filings revealed this week,” *The New York Times* reported on Friday night.

So, linking Trump to Moscow as a way to bring Russia into the election story was the Democrats’ aim from the start.

Fusion GPS then hired ex-MI6 intelligence agent Steele, it says for the first time, to dig up that dirt in Russia for

the Democrats. Steele produced classic opposition research, not an intelligence assessment or conclusion, although it was written in a style and formatted to look like one.

It's important to realize that Steele was no longer working for an official intelligence agency, which would have imposed strict standards on his work and possibly disciplined him for injecting false information into the government's decision-making. Instead, he was working for a political party and a presidential candidate looking for dirt that would hurt their opponent, what the Clintons used to call "cash for trash" when they were the targets.

Had Steele been doing legitimate intelligence work for his government, he would have taken a far different approach. Intelligence professionals are not supposed to just give their bosses what their bosses want to hear. So, Steele would have verified his information. And it would have gone through a process of further verification by other intelligence analysts in his and perhaps other intelligence agencies. For instance, in the U.S., a National Intelligence Estimate requires vetting by all 17 intelligence agencies and incorporates dissenting opinions.

Instead Steele was producing a piece of purely political research and had different motivations. The first might well have been money, as he was being paid specifically for this project, not as part of his work on a government salary presumably serving all of society. Secondly, to continue being paid for each subsequent memo that he produced he would have been incentivized to please his clients or at least give them enough so they would come back for more.

## Dubious Stuff

Opposition research is about getting dirt to be used in a mud-slinging political campaign, in which wild charges against candidates are the norm. This “oppo” is full of unvetted rumor and innuendo with enough facts mixed in to make it seem credible. There was so much dubious stuff in Steele’s memos that the FBI was unable to confirm its most salacious allegations and apparently refuted several key points.

Perhaps more significantly, the corporate news media, which was largely partial to Clinton, did not report the fantastic allegations after people close to the Clinton campaign began circulating the lurid stories before the election with the hope that the material would pop up in the news. To their credit, established media outlets recognized this as ammunition against a political opponent, not a serious document.

Despite this circumspection, the Steele dossier was shared with the FBI at some point in the summer of 2016 and apparently became the basis for the FBI to seek Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants against members of Trump’s campaign. More alarmingly, it may have formed the basis for much of the Jan. 6 intelligence “assessment” by those “hand-picked” analysts from three U.S. intelligence agencies – the CIA, the FBI and the NSA – not all 17 agencies that Hillary Clinton continues to insist were involved. (Obama’s intelligence chiefs, DNI Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan, publicly admitted that only three agencies took part and *The New York Times* printed a correction saying so.)

If in fact the Steele memos were a primary basis for the Russia collusion allegations against Trump, then there may be no credible evidence at all. It could be that because the three agencies knew the dossier was dodgy that there was no substantive proof in the Jan. 6 “assessment.” Even so, a summary of the Steele allegations were included in a secret appendix that then-FBI Director James Comey described to then-President-elect Trump just two weeks before his inauguration.

Five days later, after the fact of Comey’s briefing was leaked to the press, the Steele dossier was published in full by the sensationalist website BuzzFeed behind the excuse that the allegations’ inclusion in the classified annex of a U.S. intelligence report justified the dossier’s publication regardless of doubts about its accuracy.

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### **Russian Fingerprints**

The other source of blame about Russian meddling came from the private company CrowdStrike because the DNC blocked the FBI from examining its server after a suspected hack. Within a day, CrowdStrike claimed to find Russian “fingerprints” in the metadata of a DNC opposition research document, which had been revealed by an Internet site called DCLeaks, showing Cyrillic letters and the name of the first Soviet

intelligence chief. That supposedly implicated Russia.

CrowdStrike also claimed that the alleged Russian intelligence operation was extremely sophisticated and skilled in concealing its external penetration of the server. But CrowdStrike's conclusion about Russian "fingerprints" resulted from clues that would have been left behind by extremely sloppy hackers or inserted intentionally to implicate the Russians.

CrowdStrike's credibility was further undermined when *Voice of America* reported on March 23, 2017, that the same software the company says it used to blame Russia for the hack wrongly concluded that Moscow also had hacked Ukrainian government howitzers on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine.

"An influential British think tank and Ukraine's military are disputing a report that the U.S. cyber-security firm CrowdStrike has used to buttress its claims of Russian hacking in the presidential election," *VOA* reported. Dimitri Alperovitch, a CrowdStrike co-founder, is also a senior fellow at the anti-Russian Atlantic Council think tank in Washington.

More speculation about the alleged election hack was raised with WikiLeaks' Vault 7 release, which revealed that the CIA is not beyond covering up its own hacks by leaving clues implicating others. Plus, there's the fact that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has declared again and again that WikiLeaks did not get the Democratic emails from the Russians. Buttressing Assange's denials of a Russian role, WikiLeaks associate Craig Murray, a former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, said he met a person connected to

the leak during a trip to Washington last year.

And, William Binney, maybe the best mathematician to ever work at the National Security Agency, and former CIA analyst Ray McGovern have [published a technical analysis](#) of one set of Democratic email metadata showing that a transatlantic “hack” would have been impossible and that the evidence points to a likely leak by a disgruntled Democratic insider. Binney has further stated that if it were a “hack,” the NSA would have been able to detect it and make the evidence known.

### **Fueling Neo-McCarthyism**

Despite these doubts, which the U.S. mainstream media has largely ignored, Russia-gate has grown into something much more than an election story. It has unleashed a neo-McCarthyite attack on Americans who are accused of being dupes of Russia if they dare question the evidence of the Kremlin’s guilt.

Just weeks after last November’s election, *The Washington Post* [published a front-page story](#) touting a blacklist from an anonymous group, called PropOrNot, that alleged that 200 news sites, including ***Consortiumnews.com*** and other leading independent news sources, were either willful Russian propagandists or “useful idiots.”

Last week, a [new list](#) emerged with the names of over 2,000 people, mostly Westerners, who have appeared on RT, the Russian government-financed English-language news channel. The list was part of a report entitled, “The Kremlin’s Platform for ‘Useful Idiots’ in the West,” put out by an outfit called European Values, with a [long list](#) of European



funders.

Included on the list of “useful idiots” absurdly are CIA-friendly Washington Post columnist David Ignatius; David Brock, Hillary Clinton’s opposition research chief; and U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The report stated: “Many people in Europe and the US, including politicians and other persons of influence, continue to exhibit troubling naïveté about RT’s political agenda, buying into the network’s marketing ploy that it is simply an outlet for independent voices marginalised by the mainstream Western press. These ‘useful idiots’ remain oblivious to RT’s intentions and boost its legitimacy by granting interviews on its shows and newscasts.”

The intent of these lists is clear: to shut down dissenting voices who question Western foreign policy and who are usually excluded from Western corporate media. RT is often willing to provide a platform for a wider range of viewpoints, both from the left and right. American ruling interests fend off critical viewpoints by first suppressing them in corporate media and now condemning them as propaganda when they emerge on RT.

### **Geopolitical Risks**

More ominously, the anti-Russia mania has increased chances of direct conflict between the two nuclear superpowers. The Russia-bashing rhetoric not only served the Clinton campaign, though ultimately to ill effect, but it has pushed a longstanding U.S.-led geopolitical agenda to regain control over Russia, an advantage that the U.S. enjoyed

during the Yeltsin years in the 1990s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Wall Street rushed in behind Boris Yeltsin and Russian oligarchs to asset strip virtually the entire country, impoverishing the population. Amid widespread accounts of this grotesque corruption, Washington intervened in Russian politics to help get Yeltsin re-elected in 1996. The political rise of Vladimir Putin after Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve 1999 reversed this course, restoring Russian sovereignty over its economy and politics.

That inflamed Hillary Clinton and other American hawks whose desire was to install another Yeltsin-like figure and resume U.S. exploitation of Russia's vast natural and financial resources. To advance that cause, U.S. presidents have supported the eastward expansion of NATO and have deployed 30,000 troops on Russia's border.

In 2014, the Obama administration helped orchestrate a coup that toppled the elected government of Ukraine and installed a fiercely anti-Russian regime. The U.S. also undertook the risky policy of aiding jihadists to overthrow a secular Russian ally in Syria. The consequences have brought the world closer to nuclear annihilation than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In this context, the Democratic Party-led Russia-gate offensive was intended not only to explain away Clinton's defeat but to stop Trump – possibly via impeachment or by inflicting severe political damage – because he had talked, insincerely it is turning out, about detente with Russia. That did not fit in well with the plan at all.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at [joelauria@consortiumnews.com](mailto:joelauria@consortiumnews.com) and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .

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