

POLITICS

Mike Pompeo, Once a WikiLeaks Fan, Attacks It as Hostile Agent

By **MATTHEW ROSENBERG** APRIL 13, 2017

WASHINGTON — In his first speech as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mike Pompeo, the former Republican congressman who once applauded disclosures by WikiLeaks, attacked the group on Thursday as a stateless hostile intelligence unit eager to do the bidding of Russia and other American adversaries.

“WikiLeaks walks like a hostile intelligence service and talks like a hostile intelligence service,” Mr. Pompeo said. To support his assessment, he cited how the group had encouraged followers to join the C.I.A. and steal secrets, and how “it overwhelmingly focuses on the United States while seeking support from antidemocratic countries.”

But Mr. Pompeo’s harshest words were reserved for Julian Assange, calling the WikiLeaks founder a “narcissist” and “a fraud — a coward hiding behind a screen.”

“In Kansas, we know something about false wizards,” added Mr. Pompeo, who represented a congressional district in the state until he was tapped by President Trump to run the C.I.A.

Mr. Pompeo’s view of WikiLeaks is hardly unique for a senior American intelligence official. But his decision to focus on the group in his debut on Washington’s think-tank circuit as

C.I.A. director was the latest sign that neither Mr. Trump nor many of his most senior officials consider themselves beholden to statements they made or stances they took in the presidential campaign, whether they be on WikiLeaks or on allegations of Chinese currency manipulation.

To be sure, Mr. Pompeo never went as far in praising WikiLeaks as Mr. Trump, who declared in a speech on Oct. 10, “I love WikiLeaks!”

But Mr. Pompeo, speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, an independent research group, appeared to have no compunction during the campaign about pointing people toward emails stolen by Russian hackers from the Democratic National Committee and then posted by WikiLeaks.

“Need further proof that the fix was in from Pres. Obama on down? BUSTED: 19,252 Emails from DNC Leaked by WikiLeaks,” he wrote in a Twitter post in July that included a link to a conservative blog. The emails to which the post referred showed that Democratic Party officials favored Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders in the primary.

Since taking office, though, the Trump administration has found itself on the receiving end of WikiLeaks disclosures. Last month, the group released thousands of pages of documents describing sophisticated software tools and techniques used by the C.I.A. to break into smartphones, computers and even internet-connected televisions.

In deploring leakers, Mr. Pompeo opened his remarks on Thursday with an anecdote about Phillip Agee, the former C.I.A. officer who turned against the agency and spent years exposing undercover American spies overseas. He died in Havana in 2008.

Like Mr. Agee, leakers “choose to see themselves in a romantic light,” Mr. Pompeo said. “They cling to this fiction, even though their disclosures often inflict irreparable harm.”

He then turned to WikiLeaks, citing its release of Democratic Party emails stolen by Russian hackers — the same stolen emails he was promoting in July — as evidence of its hostile intent.

“It’s time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is: a nonstate hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia,” he said.

During the presidential campaign, Mr. Pompeo said, “Russian military intelligence, the G.R.U., had used WikiLeaks to release data of U.S. victims that the G.R.U. had obtained through cyberoperations against the Democratic National Committee.”

He also said that Mr. Assange, who has spent nearly five years holed up in the Ecuadorean embassy in London to avoid extradition on sexual assault charges in Sweden, did not enjoy First Amendment protections.

“No one has the right to engage in the theft of secrets from America,” Mr. Pompeo said.

Neither Juan Zarate, a deputy national security adviser during the George W. Bush administration who was leading the discussion, nor the crowd, which was made up largely of current and former national security officials, seemed eager to call out the apparent dissonance between Mr. Pompeo’s July Twitter post, which has since been deleted, and his current views.

After Mr. Pompeo’s remarks, Mr. Zarate asked only one question about investigations into the Russian hacking. He prefaced his query to Mr. Pompeo by saying, “I have to ask this question, I guess.”

Mr. Pompeo replied that he could not comment on the investigations, adding, “They’ll run their course.” He added that Russia would continue to try to meddle in elections in the United States, and was doing the same in Europe.

Mr. Pompeo also escaped any direct questions about how he was managing to heal the rift between the C.I.A. and Mr. Trump, who during the presidential transition compared American intelligence agencies to Nazis.

Asked about his own relationship with the president, Mr. Pompeo said, “it’s fantastic,” adding that he personally delivered Mr. Trump’s intelligence briefing on most days.

Mr. Trump and his team “are voracious consumers of the product we develop,” he said. “The president also is completely prepared to hear things that run counter to the hypothesis.”

But the focus of most of the hourlong question-and-answer session was on the myriad threats and challenges facing the United States, including Syria, Iran and North Korea. Mr. Pompeo recounted how under extremely tight deadlines last week, analysts from the C.I.A.

and other intelligence agencies quickly determined that Syria had used sarin gas against its own people, and gathered the evidence to prove it.

“Russia is now on their sixth or seventh story, none of which has an ounce of truth to it,” he said, referring to Moscow’s denials.

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Eric Schmitt contributed reporting.

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