

LEGAL MUSCLE

'Silk Road' Lawyer Defending WikiLeaks

Against Dems' Lawsuit

Joshua Dratel, best known for defending darknet drug-market founder Ross Ulbricht, says he and WikiLeaks 'look forward to litigating' First Amendment issues in the DNC's suit.



Kevin Poulsen

10.11.18 1:26 AM ET



Axel Schmidt/Reuters

WikiLeaks has brought in some legal muscle to defend it from a multimillion-dollar lawsuit filed by the Democratic National Committee over Russia's 2016 election-interference campaign.

New York attorney Joshua Dratel made a name for himself representing high-profile defendants in complex federal cases, including terrorism prosecutions, and he was the first civilian lawyer to represent a prisoner at Guantanamo Bay. He's best known for defending Ross Ulbricht, who, as "Dread Pirate Roberts" founded the notorious darknet drug market Silk Road. In 2015, a jury [convicted Ulbricht](#) of money laundering, hacking, narcotics trafficking, and other charges, and Ulbricht was sentenced to life in prison.

On Wednesday, Dratel notified the Manhattan judge overseeing the DNC lawsuit that he would be representing WikiLeaks.

"The lawsuit against WikiLeaks is entirely without merit, and this case presents critical First Amendment issues that we look forward to litigating," Dratel told The Daily Beast in an email Wednesday.

The DNC [filed its lawsuit](#) in April in U.S. District Court in Manhattan. The complaint alleges racketeering, conspiracy, and other wrongdoing by dozens of individuals and organizations with a common interest in electing Donald Trump and defeating Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election.

In addition to WikiLeaks and founder Julian Assange, defendants include the Trump campaign, and individual Trump advisers or campaign staff including Roger Stone, Jared Kushner, and Donald Trump Jr., as well as the Russian government and the GRU—the Russian intelligence agency behind the computer intrusions and resultant leaks that tentposted Russia's 2016 election interference. Trump himself is not a defendant. The lawsuit seeks unspecified compensation for "all damages and losses"

suffered by the DNC as a result of the intrusion and leak—a number that could easily climb into the millions.

Russia's GRU had already been publicly identified as the culprit in the DNC intrusion when, in July 2016, WikiLeaks began releasing 20,000 emails stolen in the hack attack. On the heels of the leak, Trump openly praised WikiLeaks in campaign rallies and at one point urged the Russian government to target Clinton's personal emails as well. In October 2016 Trump Jr. promoted the leaks on Twitter at Assange's [private urging](#).

The DNC alleges WikiLeaks published the material “knowing that doing so would benefit the Russian government, Russian instrumentalities, or Russian agents, in furtherance of the illegal scheme.”

“Assange and WikiLeaks... shared a common purpose in undermining Secretary Clinton's candidacy and promoting Trump,” the DNC's lawsuit alleges. “Assange had a long history with Secretary Clinton, and Assange publicly stated that his policy disagreements with Clinton would make her presidency far more problematic than a Trump presidency.”

Though Dratel is defending WikiLeaks, he has not signed on to represent Assange, who is also being sued personally in the case.

- **Kevin Poulsen**

@kpoulsenKevin.Poulsen@thedailybeast.com