

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange will host a talk show on a Russian TV network



VALENTIN FLAURAUD/REUTERS - WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

By **Paul Farhi**, Published: January 25

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has championed the exposure of government secrets, is getting his own TV show — on a network bankrolled by the Russian government.

Assange will host a talk show on the Kremlin-backed RT news network starting in March, focusing on what the network said in an announcement Wednesday is “his favorite topic: controversy.”

WikiLeaks, Assange’s Web site, has posted classified U.S. military documents and videos, as well as American diplomatic cables that were apparently taken from classified U.S. databases.

In a news release, WikiLeaks said the Australian-born Assange, 40, will host 10 half-hour conversations with “key political players, thinkers and revolutionaries from around the world.”

The content and guests remain “secret for now,” according to RT (formerly known as Russia Today).

One potential production problem: Assange is under house arrest in Britain and is fighting extradition to Sweden, where he is facing sexual assault allegations by two women. He has denied the charges. His legal troubles have strained WikiLeaks’ financial resources.

In interviews in late 2010, Assange threatened to release documents about Russia and other “repressive regimes” but never followed up.

Western news organizations and some Russians have called RT a propaganda arm of the Kremlin. The English-language network — whose slogan is “Question more” — is aired throughout the Washington area by MHz Networks, a Falls Church-based educational broadcaster that carries channels from Japan, France and other countries. MHz is also carried by satellite and cable systems that reach about 35 million homes across the country.

While U.S. officials have been harshly critical of WikiLeaks and Assange, he appears to be viewed differently in Russia. In December 2010, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called Assange’s detention in Britain undemocratic. The Guardian newspaper of London quoted a source close to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that same month suggesting that Assange should be nominated for a Nobel Prize.

In addition to the publicity WikiLeaks has received, many Americans are familiar with Assange because of a parody of him on “Saturday Night Live,” on which he was played several times by actor-comedian Bill Hader.