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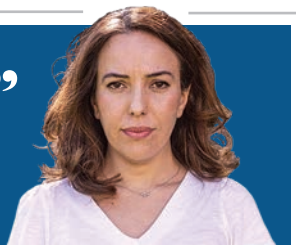

"Julian's case is so corrupt"
Stella Moris, Assange's partner *Page 4*

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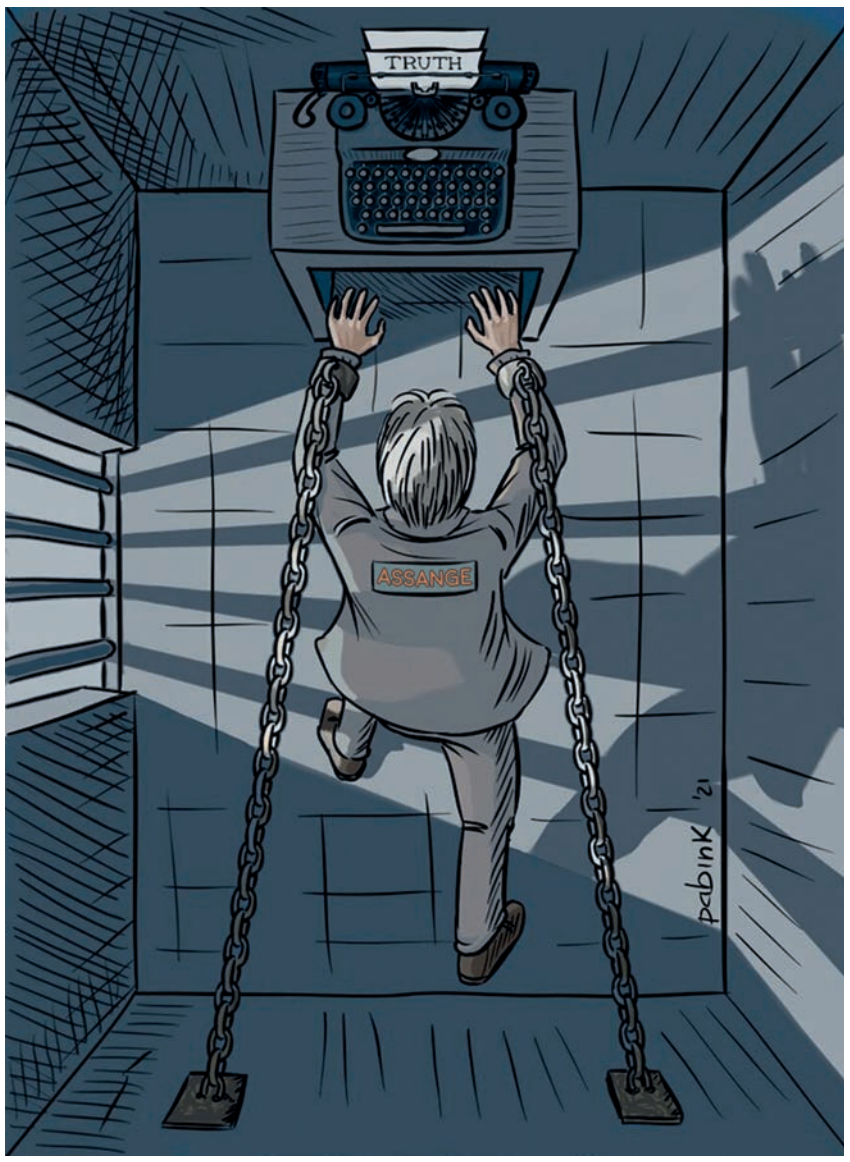
Brutal crimes of falling empires



From the war in Afghanistan to Assange's persecution: this "justice" brings no peace

Editorial

Julian Assange's case is a historical focal point through which we observe what seems like the decline of the British and US empires, their global influence and their moral standing in the world. We stand at a crossroads, determining the future of our fundamental rights – namely the freedom of information and the freedom to publish.

The illegal actions and procedures initiated against Assange and WikiLeaks over more than a decade are too numerous to list here. From a revoked political asylum coupled with the storming of an embassy to the surveillance of private attorney-client conversations; from arbitrary detention without charge to indictments published beyond their legal deadlines; from kidnapping and assassination plots (see page 6) to the expunging of the crimes of a sociopath in return for false testimonies (see page 9). It appears that more steps against Assange were taken outside the boundaries of the law than within them. What is left of the 'legal' procedure? A sad farce, barely attempting to cover up the unjustifiable.

These brazen and brutal violations of core Western democratic values should be seen as a warning for us all. For if nation states, when sufficiently embarrassed by revelations of their own crimes and lies, are capable of such inhumane wrath, then anyone could one day be subjected to a similarly arbitrary and unjust treatment. Particularly as we collectively pursue the necessary endeavour of holding to account the warmongers, the war criminals and profiteers, while ensuring that those denouncing them remain safe and out of jail.

In a hopeful reading of history, the inevitable defeat of the US in their war in Afghanistan – foreseen if not precipitated by WikiLeaks publications (see page 14) – will come to symbolise the end of the global military interventionism and political expansionism of a single superpower. Likewise, in a hopeful future, the exposure of the persecution of Assange will be read as the falling out of relevance of an entire class of political and institutional actors who enabled this democratic disgrace (see centrefold map).

This history remains to be written. We all have, for better or worse, a part in writing it today.■

Why is Biden prosecuting Assange for telling the truth about Afghanistan?

Daniel Ellsberg, Alice Walker and Noam Chomsky
Co-chairs of Assange Defense
First published on 10 September 2021 in NewsWeek

As we approach the 20th anniversary of 9/11, in the midst of a wrenching reassessment of our endless wars, we cannot ignore the US government's persecution of those who revealed the brutality of the Afghan war and the lies on which it was founded.

The Biden administration is stubbornly pursuing the extradition of Julian Assange, who exposed the corrupt motives and doomed policies behind the War on Terror. This unprecedented political prosecution poses a grave threat to truth telling and freedom of the press.

Commentators across the media have drawn parallels between the US withdrawal from Kabul and the fall of Saigon in 1975. Four years before the exit from Vietnam, The New York Times, The Washington Post and 17 other newspapers published the Pentagon Papers, a classified archive showing that US intervention in Vietnam had been wrong from the start, and was prolonged for decades through deliberate deception.

One of us, Daniel Ellsberg, released those files. Fifty years after his case was dismissed due to governmental criminal misconduct, the American bombing and occupation of Vietnam is viewed near-unanimously as an ill-fated policy whose pursuit was morally wrong. The parallels between that case and the work of Assange – and his source, US Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning – are striking. Thanks in large part to their revelations a decade ago, Americans are increasingly seeing our occupation and bombing of Afghanistan in a similar light to our Vietnam policy.

When Assange published hundreds of thousands of classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010, the public was given an unprecedented window into the lack of justification and the futility of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The truth was hidden by a generation of governmental lies. Assange's efforts helped show the American public what their government was doing in their name.

Assange summed up his anti-war ethos at a 2011 rally in London. "The goal is justice, the method is transparency," he said. "If wars can be started by lies, peace can be started by truth".

Manning told the judge in her court-martial, "I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan were targets that needed to be neutralised, but rather people who were

Continued on page 2

Biden's Justice Department, which has proclaimed a renewed commitment to press freedom, could end these proceedings at any moment.

DANIEL ELLSBERG, ALICE WALKER AND NOAM CHOMSKY, CO-CHAIRS OF ASSANGE DEFENSE

Why is Biden prosecuting Assange for telling the truth about Afghanistan?

Continued from page 1

struggling to live". Manning and Assange acted on their belief that the public deserved to see the reality of these wars and the horrors of how they were conducted.

Two of us, Ellsberg and Noam Chomsky, testified for Assange at his extradition hearing last year. In Ellsberg's words then, the WikiLeaks publications that Assange is being charged for are "amongst the most important truthful revelations of hidden criminal state behavior that have been made public in US history". The American public "needed urgently to know what was being done routinely in their name, and there was no other way for them to learn it than by unauthorised disclosure".

When the files were first published, with Joe Biden as vice president, the Obama administration empaneled a grand jury to investigate. In 2013, it declined to prosecute due to what it called the "New York Times problem" – the dilemma of indicting Assange for the very same kind of investigative journalism that mainstream media engages frequently (though not as much as they should). But in May 2019, viewing the press as "the enemy of the people," the Trump Justice Department indicted Assange under the much-abused Espionage Act.

No media outlet or journalist has ever been successfully prosecuted under the Espionage Act for publishing truthful information in the public interest, which is protected by the First Amendment. These charges send a message to reporters around the world – Assange is an Australian citizen, not an American – that the US government will decide what can and cannot be published about its misdeeds, even beyond its borders.

Assange warned the public that the goal in Afghanistan "is to have an endless war, not a successful war". Last month, as troops were beginning to pull out of Afghanistan, video of these comments went viral, with more than 3 million views in a week. Assange's warning in 2011 is conventional wisdom in 2021.

So why isn't he a free man? In January, a British judge denied the US extradition request on grounds that sending Assange to the US prison system would put him at risk of suicide. In Donald Trump's final days in office, the US government appealed that decision.

Biden's Justice Department, which has proclaimed a renewed commitment to press freedom, could end these proceedings at any moment. Biden now owns the prosecution of Julian Assange by actively pursuing Trump's appeal.

Biden stuck to his word and finally ended the war in Afghanistan. But he cannot close this chapter with the man who told the truth about that war still in prison.■

At meetings between senior Trump administration officials after WikiLeaks started publishing the Vault 7 materials, Pompeo began discussing kidnapping Assange.

While the notion of kidnapping Assange preceded Pompeo's arrival at Langley, the new director championed the proposals, according to former officials.

Pompeo and others at the agency proposed abducting Assange from the embassy and surreptitiously bringing him back to the United States via a third country, a process known as rendition.

The idea was to "break into the embassy, drag Assange out and bring him to where we want," said a former intelligence official. A less extreme version of the proposal involved US operatives snatching Assange from the embassy and turning him over to British authorities.

EXCERPT FROM A YAHOO NEWS INVESTIGATION ON CIA PLANS TO KIDNAP AND ASSASSINATE JULIAN ASSANGE

Scan to read full article:

My son, Julian Assange

John Shipton answers your questions

An exclusive video series and a lovely fireside chat with John Shipton, about the persecution of his son Julian Assange. Julian faces extradition to the US where he is threatened with a 175 year sentence in a maximum security prison for publishing the truth about war crimes.

The video series touches various topics such as the war in Afghanistan, freedom of the press, geopolitics of the empire, the disturbing role of the CIA plotting against Assange, and his extradition hearings in the UK.

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> **“What has not been discussed today is why I feared for my safety and the safety of our children and for Julian’s life.**
>
> STELLA MORIS, PARTNER OF JULIAN ASSANGE

John Pilger
First published on 12 August 2021 at consortiumnews.com

I sat in Court 4 in the Royal Courts of Justice in London yesterday with Stella Moris, Julian Assange’s partner. I have known Stella for as long as I have known Julian. She, too, is a voice of freedom, coming from a family that fought the fascism of Apartheid. Today, her name was uttered in court by a barrister and a judge, forgettable people were it not for the power of their endowed privilege.

The barrister, Clair Dobbin, is in the pay of the regime in Washington, first Trump’s then Biden’s. She is America’s hired gun, or “silk”, as she would prefer. Her target is Julian Assange, who has committed no crime and has performed an historic public service by exposing the criminal actions and secrets on which governments, especially those claiming to be democracies, base their authority.

For those who may have forgotten, WikiLeaks, of which Assange is founder and publisher, exposed the secrets and lies that led to the invasion of Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the murderous role of the Pentagon in dozens of countries, the blueprint for the 20-year catastrophe in Afghanistan, the attempts by Washington to overthrow elected governments, such as Venezuela’s, the collusion between nominal political opponents (Bush and Obama) to stifle a torture investigation and the CIA’s Vault 7 campaign that turned your mobile phone, even your TV set, into a spy in your midst.

WikiLeaks released almost a million documents from Russia which allowed Russian citizens to stand up for their rights. It revealed the Australian government had colluded with the US against its own citizen, Assange. It named those Australian politicians who have “informed” for the US. It made the connection between the Clinton Foundation and the rise of jihadism in American-armed states in the Gulf.

There is more: WikiLeaks disclosed the US campaign to suppress wages in sweatshop countries like Haiti, India’s campaign of torture in Kashmir, the British government’s secret agreement to shield “US interests” in its official Iraq inquiry and the British Foreign Office’s plan to create a fake “marine protection zone” in the Indian Ocean to cheat the Chagos islanders out of their right of return.

In other words, WikiLeaks has given us real news about those who govern us and take us to war, not the preordained, repetitive spin that fills newspapers and television screens. This is real journalism; and for the crime of real journalism, Assange has spent most of the past decade in one form of incarceration or another, including Belmarsh prison, a horrific place.

Diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, he is a gentle, intellectual visionary driven by his belief that a democracy is not a democracy unless it is transparent, and accountable.

Yesterday, the United States sought the approval of Britain’s High Court to extend the terms of its appeal against a decision by a district judge, Vanessa Baraitser, in January to bar Assange’s extradition. Baraitser accepted the deeply disturbing evidence of a number of experts that Assange would be at great risk if he were incarcerated in the US’s infamous prison system.

Professor Michael Kopelman, a world authority on neuro-psychiatry, had said Assange would find a way to take his own life – the direct result of what Professor Nils Melzer, the United Nations Rapporteur on Torture, described as the craven “mobbing” of Assange by governments - and their media echoes.

Those of us who were in the Old Bailey last September to hear Kopelman’s evidence were shocked and moved. I sat with Julian’s father, John Shipton, whose head was in his hands. The court was also told about the discovery of a razor blade in Julian’s Belmarsh cell and that he had made desperate calls to the Samaritans and written notes and much else that filled us with more than sadness.

Watching the lead barrister acting for Washington, James Lewis – a man from a military background who deploys a cringingly theatrical “aha!” formula with defence witnesses – reduce these facts to “malingering” and smearing witnesses, especially Kopelman, we were heartened by Kopelman’s revealing response that Lewis’s abuse was “a bit rich” as Lewis himself had sought to hire Kopelman’s expertise in another case.

Lewis’s sidekick is Clair Dobbin, and yesterday was her day. Completing the smearing of Professor Kopelman was down to her. An American with some authority sat behind her in court.

Dobbin said Kopelman had “misled” Judge Baraister in September because he had not disclosed that Julian Assange and Stella Moris were partners, and their two young children, Gabriel and Max, were conceived during the period Assange had taken refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

The implication was that this somehow lessened Kopelman’s medical diagnosis: that Julian, locked up in solitary in Belmarsh prison and facing extradition to the US on bogus “espionage” charges, had suffered severe psychotic depression and had planned, if he had not already attempted, to take his own life.

For her part, Judge Baraitser saw no contradiction. The full nature of the relationship between Stella and Julian had been explained to her in March 2020, and Professor Kopelman had made full reference to it in his report in August 2020. So the judge and the court knew all about it before the main extradition hearing last September. In her judgement in January, Baraitser said this:

[Professor Kopelman] assessed Mr. Assange during the period May to December 2019 and was best placed to consider at first-hand his symptoms. He has taken great care to provide an informed account of Mr. Assange background and psychiatric history. He has given close attention to the prison medical notes and provided a detailed summary annexed to his December report. He is an experienced clinician and he was well aware of the possibility of exaggeration and malingering. I had no reason to doubt his clinical opinion.

She added that she had “not been misled” by the exclusion in Kopelman’s first report of the Stella-Julian relationship and that she understood that Kopelman was protecting the privacy of Stella and her two young children.

In fact, as I know well, the family’s safety was under constant threat to the point when an embassy security guard confessed he had been told to steal one of the baby’s nappies so that a CIA-contracted company could analyse its DNA. There has been a stream of unpublicised threats against Stella and her children.

For the US and its legal hirelings in London, damaging the credibility of a renowned expert by suggesting he withheld this information was a way, they no doubt reckoned, to rescue their crumbling case against Assange. In June, the Icelandic newspaper Stundin reported that a key prosecution witness against Assange has admitted fabricating his evidence. The one “hacking” charge the Americans hoped to bring against Assange if they could get their hands on him depended on this source and witness, Sigurdur Thordarson, an FBI informant.

Thordarson had worked as a volunteer for WikiLeaks in Iceland between 2010 and 2011. In 2011, as several criminal charges were brought against him, he contacted the FBI and offered to become an informant in return for immunity from all prosecution. It emerged that he was a convicted fraudster who embezzled $55,000 from WikiLeaks, and served two years in prison. In 2015, he was sentenced to three years for sex offenses against teenage boys. The Washington Post described Thordarson’s credibility as the “core” of the case against Assange.

Yesterday, Lord Chief Justice Holroyde made no mention of this witness. His concern was that it was “arguable” that Judge Baraitser had attached too much weight to the evidence of Professor Kopelman, a man revered in his field. He said it was “very unusual” for an appeal court to have to reconsider evidence from an expert accepted by a lower court, but he agreed with Ms. Dobbin it was “misleading” even though he accepted Kopelman’s “understandable human response” to protect the privacy of Stella and the children.

If you can unravel the arcane logic of this, you have a better grasp than I who have sat through this case from the beginning. It is clear Kopelman misled nobody. Judge Baraitser - whose hostility to Assange personally was a presence in her court - said that she was not misled; it was not an issue; it did not matter. So why had Lord Chief Justice Holroyde spun the language with its weasel legalese and sent Julian back to his cell and its nightmares? There, he now waits for the High Court’s final decision in October - for Julian Assange, a life or death decision.

And why did Holroyde send Stella from the court trembling with anguish? Why is this case “unusual”? Why did he throw the gang of prosecutor-thugs at the Department of Justice in Washington – who got their big chance under Trump, having been rejected by Obama – a life raft as their rotting, corrupt case against a principled journalist sunk as surely as Titantic?

This does not necessarily mean that in October the full bench of the High Court will order Julian to be extradited. In the upper reaches of the masonry that is the British judiciary there are, I understand, still those who believe in real law and real justice from which the term “British justice” takes its sanctified reputation in the land of the Magna Carta. It now rests on their ermined shoulders whether that history lives on or dies.

I sat with Stella in the court’s colonnade while she drafted words to say to the crowd of media and well-wishers outside in the sunshine. Clip-clopping along came Clair Dobbin, spruced, ponytail swinging, bearing her carton of files: a figure of certainty: she who said Julian Assange was “not so ill” that he would consider suicide. How does she know?

Has Ms. Dobbin worked her way through the medieval maze at Belmarsh to sit with Julian in his yellow arm band, as Professors Koppelman and Melzer have done, and Stella has done, and I have done? Never mind. The Americans have now “promised” not to put him in a hellhole, just as they “promised” not to torture Chelsea Manning, just as they promised…

And has she read the WikiLeaks’ leak of a Pentagon document dated 15 March, 2009? This foretold the current war on journalism. US intelligence, it said, intended to destroy WikiLeaks’ and Julian Assange’s “centre of gravity” with threats and “criminal prosecution”. Read all 32 pages and you are left in no doubt that silencing and criminalising independent journalism was the aim, smear the method.

I tried to catch Ms. Dobbin’s gaze, but she was on her way: job done.

Outside, Stella struggled to contain her emotion. This is one brave woman, as indeed her man is an exemplar of courage. “What has not been discussed today,” said Stella, “is why I feared for my safety and the safety of our children and for Julian’s life. The constant threats and intimidation we endured for years, which has been terrorising us and has been terrorising Julian for 10 years. We have a right to live, we have a right to exist and we have a right for this nightmare to come to an end once and for all”.■

"Julian's case is so corrupt"

Stella Moris
Julian Assange's partner and lawyer
Excerpts from a Stundin.is *interview first published on 31 July 2021*

Assange has been attacked on multiple fronts since he exposed many secrets from within companies including pharmaceutical companies and banks, the military and governments. Some people would just say this is a losing fight. Why don't you just give up now after 10 years of fighting a system that seems to be unbeatable. What is your thinking on this?

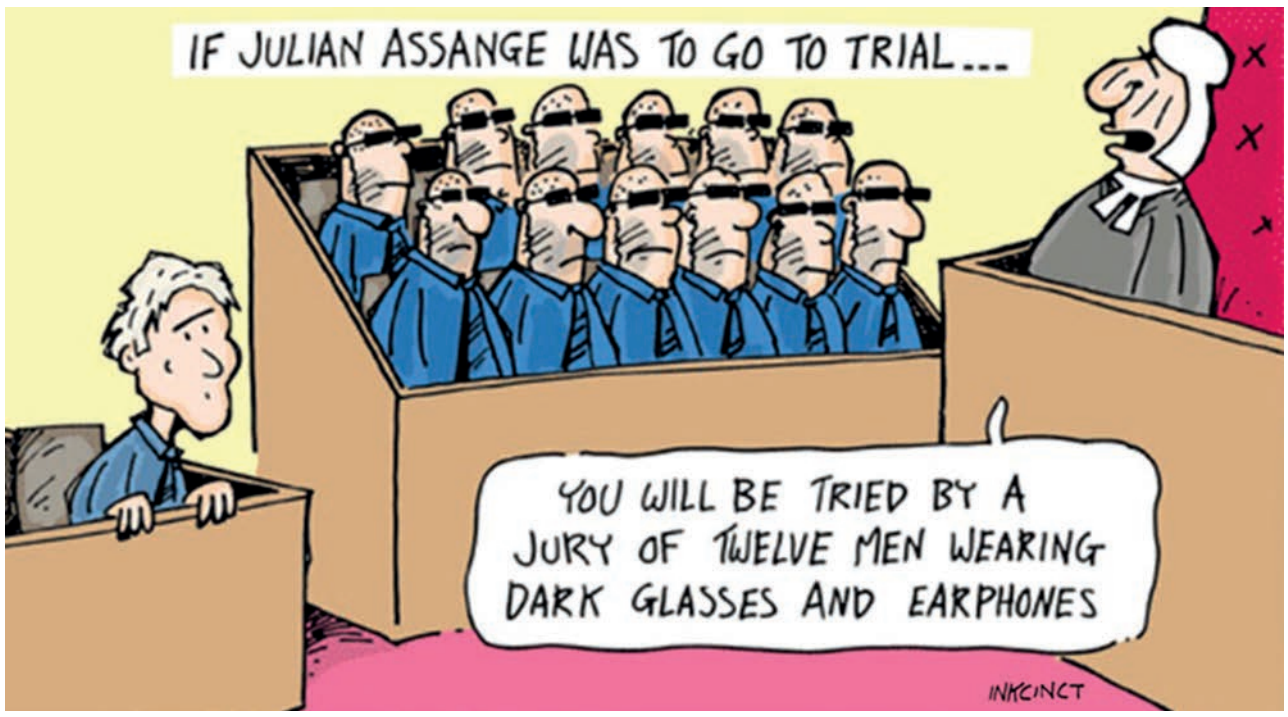
It's more like if we lose this fight, we lose our liberties, we lose democracy, we lose our right to know, it's kind of the mother of all fights. So many things converge in the attack on Julian, that he has to win it, because if he loses this fight, then we're all exposed. It's not just about an attack on journalism, it's an attack on the fundamental values of liberal democracies; it creates a new standard through which our liberties are limited, permanently. So it's not just about one man, although it is about Julian as a person. It's about these greater principles, but it's also about an innocent man who's politically persecuted and has been viciously attacked and who is wrongly imprisoned. It's about the crimes that he exposed but also the ongoing crimes that are being committed against him and the ongoing abuse of the process against him.

If this is allowed to continue then we're all lost, then we're not living in a liberal democracy, we're living in a system where we are not allowed to have insight in to the inner workings of government. In fact, if we do expose the inner workings of government, then we're thrown into jail, and we're silenced forever.

And why do you think that so few governments in the world – elected democratic governments and the members of their parliaments – have been standing up and saying enough is enough, this man committed no crime?

There are, I think, many politicians in various countries who are standing up even though it's not happening in their countries. They understand the implications, they understand the kind of attack on the sovereignty of the rest of the world. These countries understand that what's being done to Julian is an attack on someone who is regarded as one of the greatest freedom of expression fighters and journalists in recent history. So there are people who are standing up and you have cross party groups in Iceland, in Germany, in Australia and in the UK, who are saying enough is enough. And I think it's down to a lack of understanding of what is really being alleged, that it's actually Julian's journalism that is being criminalised and therefore that it's an attack on the public's right to know.

We have to acknowledge that there's been a lot of attacks on Julian's reputation but I don't think that's the biggest factor. I think the biggest factor is that many people with political influence are also connected to these centres of power that Julian has upset and who wants to silence him. But that's not all politicians. And it's changing. There's enormous support for Julian. In fact, even the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), the Council of Europe, the UN, you couldn't want for better allies in this fight. I think that the case is actually, for anyone who looks into it, so clear. Just the political persecution is so obvious that even establishment players are opposed to it and are fighting it.



> **"People need to demand that everyone who can have influence on the situation should act decisively because the reality is that Julian is running out of time.**

What is it that people can do to help Julian in this fight?

I think they need to express their support for Julian. There should be no hesitation in calling Julian what he is: a journalist. There should be no hesitation to name what is happening here. The political persecution of a journalist and the political persecution of the person who has fought for the public's right to know. The public's right to know is what's under attack, what's being imprisoned.

People need to demand that everyone who can have influence on the situation should act decisively because the reality is that Julian is running out of time. He has been in atrocious conditions for seven years in the embassy and he's in a terrible prison at the moment as we speak, where he's been for over two years, soon to be two and a half years. He shouldn't be there. Julian is a gentle intellectual. He's a public intellectual. And he's being punished. These political forces are instrumentalising the law and law enforcement to keep him there – and they're actively keeping him there. It's not like some inevitable status quo. There are forces that are keeping Julian in prison and we need to mount the forces that can get him out of prison.

This is a political case. And so it is shaped by what people feel and express about the situation; that is what shapes what is possible. And so that's what I'd urge every person of good conscience to do: to express their opposition to this vicious attack on Julian and on all of our freedoms.

How is it when you visit Julian and then have to leave the prison?

Every time I leave, I'm just dumbstruck. Intellectually you understand the situation. But then it just kind of hits you when you're there and you're leaving. And you think, "Why can't I just leave with Julian? Why is he sitting there? Why are these people preventing him from leaving? Why does he have to go through that iron door to a cell and be alone? Why am I having to live a life as a single mother?" He hasn't done anything wrong. He's done everything right. He's embodied what we say our values are. And this punishment, which is there for everyone to see, is just an outrageous abusive punishment that's outside of the higher laws, is just prolonged and profoundly wrong.

So I think you have to maintain this outrage to never accept this. I'm convinced that Julian will win this. Especially because the case is so corrupt. The actions that have been taken against Julian are so corrupt, openly for everyone to see. The accusations against Julian have no legs to stand on. Each action that has been taken against him is riddled with illegality and abuse.

If you could get a message to President Biden, what would that be?

Not to walk in the footsteps of President Trump. That the attack against Julian is an attack on the central values of the US Constitution. The Biden administration has a choice. The investigation against WikiLeaks started when Obama was president in 2010. And when Obama left office in 2016, he decided to commute the sentence of Chelsea Manning, who was the source of the publications that WikiLeaks published.

The Obama administration also decided that Julian would not be prosecuted. The case against Julian only came under Donald Trump. And the Biden administration is faced with a choice either to side with Obama's legacy or continue Trump's legacy. And Trump's legacy is a radical departure from what has been before, because it is the first time that they have gone after someone who has received documents from a source and published them. It's a policy decision for the Biden administration to prosecute; to decide to prosecute publishers and journalists.

The Biden administration, they continued the case. Why do you think they haven't ended it?

I think there are different forces within the US government. Some are pushing for it, some are against it. Pursuing this case comes at a cost to the Biden administration. Just in February, as soon as Biden came in, all the major press freedom and civil liberties organisations in the US, wrote a letter to Biden, asking him to drop the case. And, obviously, there are career prosecutors in the DOJ (Department of Justice) who want to make a name for themselves. And once the case is initiated to a degree, it just progresses through the courts until a decision is made to abandon it.

What's pretty clear is that the case is falling apart. They never really had a case. They had to make up a new application of the so-called Espionage Act in order to manufacture a way to put Julian in prison. It's also against Biden's interests when he tries to project into the world that the US defends global media freedom. The case against Julian is, by definition, an attack on global media freedom, because he's not a US journalist, and he wasn't in the US. They're using an extradition vehicle to bring him to the US and imprison him.

What the US government is saying is that no journalist anywhere is allowed to do their job and publish the truth about what the US government does or they'll stick you in a cell for the rest of your life. So all these things bring up all the enormous contradictions between what the US government is trying to project under Biden, and the precise opposite effect of Julian's case; they're sticking one of the most highly regarded people in the world in a prison that houses terrible criminals. This is what the US says other countries do. This is what the worst regimes do to their journalists, to their dissidents, to their public intellectuals. And that's precisely what the US is doing to Julian.

The only thing that the Biden administration can do is to drop this case which also has other ramifications. It has ramifications for the Biden administration calling China out for imprisoning its dissidents. The Chinese government says look what you're doing to Assange. The difference? Julian faces 175 years, a lot of time for publishing truthful information in the public interest.

Do you think that people understand this?

I think people instinctively understand it. They might feel like they need to understand more detail in order to have a discussion about it. But I really don't think they do. You don't need the profound detail that only a handful of people know because we've lived it for 10 years. You don't need that. You just need to understand Julian published information that exposed crimes and the corrupt actions of powerful people. And that they're taking revenge against him. And that he's wrongfully imprisoned, and that he's suffering. And that it is the process that is the punishment. He's not serving a sentence, you just have to look at the essence of it. He's imprisoned for publishing information in the public interest. That's all you need to know. And over time, the details about how he's been wronged will come out. But the true nature of what's going on here, I think, is pretty obvious and increasingly obvious to anyone.■

Watch the full interview: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FREE ASSANGE
FREE ASSANGE

CIA plan to poison Assange wasn't needed

The US had already found a "lawful" way to disappear him.

Jonathan Cook
First published on 4 October 2021 at jonathon-cook.net

A Yahoo News' investigation reveals that, through much of 2017, the CIA weighed up whether to use wholly extrajudicial means to deal with the supposed threat posed by Julian Assange and his whistleblowers' platform WikiLeaks. The agency plotted either to kidnap or assassinate him.

Shocking as the revelations are – exposing the entirely lawless approach of the main US intelligence agency – the Yahoo investigation nonetheless tends to obscure rather than shine a light on the bigger picture.

Assange has not been deprived of his freedom for more than a decade because of an unimplemented rogue operation by the CIA. Rather, he has been held in various forms of captivity – disappeared – through the collaborations of various national governments and their intelligence agencies, aided by legal systems and the media, that have systematically violated his rights and legal due process.

The reality of Assange's years of persecution is far worse even than the picture of a thuggish, vengeful, power-mad CIA painted by Yahoo's reporting.

More than 30 former senior officials, who either served in the US foreign intelligence agency or the Trump administration, helped to piece together for Yahoo the various components of the CIA's plan. They show that the agency considered two main options for dealing with Assange in addition to then secret moves laying the groundwork for prosecuting the WikiLeaks founder in the US courts.

One plan was to kidnap Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had been seeking political asylum since 2012.

The aim was to smuggle him to the US – violating the sovereignty of Ecuador and the UK – in an operation that would have had all the hallmarks of "extraordinary rendition". That was the illegal procedure the US used after 9/11 to abduct suspects in the "war on terror," usually so they could be sent to "black sites" where they were tortured and held without judicial oversight.

The other CIA proposal was to assassinate Assange – or, perhaps more accurately, commit extrajudicial murder to silence him once and for all. Poisoning him was reportedly one of the methods considered.

These scenarios need to be borne in mind when we cast our minds back to 2012, to the moment Assange decided to seek sanctuary in Ecuador's embassy, fearing the wrath of the US at his exposure of its war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Not a single corporate journalist gave credence to his concerns. In fact, they ridiculed them. These latest revelations confirm what was obvious to many of the rest of us: Assange had very good reasons indeed to seek political asylum.

Desire for revenge

Let us examine that bigger picture obscured by the reporting of the CIA's plan.

The agency's much greater interest in the Assange case – and its more openly hostile attitude towards him – were a result of WikiLeaks' release of parts of a cache of secret files on the CIA's hacking capabilities known as "Vault 7". The agency, considering it "the largest data loss in CIA history," was deeply humiliated by the exposure.

The misleading impression created by the Yahoo investigation is that until 2017 a standard legal process was being pursued against Assange that only turned rogue after the Vault 7 release, when the CIA wanted vengeance and to intimidate WikiLeaks to prevent any further leaks.

In the words of one Trump national security official: "There was an inappropriate level of attention to Assange given the [CIA's] embarrassment, not the threat he posed in context. We should never act out of a desire for revenge".

The implication is that, because the CIA's various extrajudicial plots were never implemented, justice has otherwise been well served in Assange's case.

But the CIA plans indicate something else entirely. They show that, once the CIA was as infuriated by WikiLeaks' exposure of the agency's own crimes as the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House already were of theirs, it joined them in getting more actively involved in an existing extrajudicial process meant to finish off Assange and WikiLeaks.

'Don't you dare'

From the moment Assange's legal troubles began in late 2010 – when two Swedish women were reported to have launched allegations of rape – nothing followed a standard procedure. As I have previously documented, Assange's case was treated in exceptional ways by Sweden, the UK, Australia and, always lurking in the background, the US.

Swedish police, the country's media and a second prosecutor all meddled in a case the main prosecutor had already ruled did not involve a criminal offence. The testimony of one of the women – who had been encouraged to go to the police by the other – was effectively hijacked and turned into a rape allegation, seemingly against her wishes.

Inexplicably, Interpol issued a Red Notice for Assange's arrest, usually reserved for terrorists and dangerous criminals, shortly after Swedish officials had approved his traveling abroad.

In the UK the courts approved an extradition warrant for Assange that had been issued without any Swedish judicial authority. The ruling set such a terrible legal precedent that the agreement on which the extradition was based was amended shortly afterwards to ensure such a ruling could not be made again.

Once Assange fled to Ecuador's embassy, the UK government surrounded it with huge numbers of police, at great public expense. For a while, government ministers threatened to tear up diplomatic protocols established in law by sending police in to arrest Assange on foreign soil.

As a result of Freedom of Information litigation by the Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, we know Britain's prosecution service pressured Swedish prosecutors not to come to London to interview Assange through 2010 and 2011, thereby creating the embassy standoff that began a short time later. Other evidence shows Swedish prosecutors were regularly interviewing suspects in the UK – only in Assange's case was that made impossible.

British prosecutors destroyed most of the emails relating to Assange. The few that survive – by mistake – show it meddling directly in a case it should have had no legal stake in. In one, as Sweden proposed dropping the investigation against Assange in 2013, UK officials warned: "Don't you dare". Another revealing email stated: "Please do not think this case is being dealt with as just another extradition".

'Legal' theatre

This and much more took place before the CIA plans exposed by Yahoo were being hatched in 2017. Two years later, Assange was dragged by London police from the Ecuadorian embassy in a scenario that echoed the CIA's plan.

Since then, new, even more irregular "legal" proceedings – either for a supposed minor bail violation or for "espionage" in exposing US war crimes – have kept Assange indefinitely locked up in a London maximum-security prison.

The point here is that the idea that the CIA suddenly tried to interfere in a sound, legal process against Assange is laughable.

Everything about the Assange case from the outset has been extrajudicial – in the sense that there has been no legal basis for the proceedings. It has been "legal" theatre, concealing the brute force of an unaccountable superpower angry and fearful that, in the digital age, its secrets and crimes can no longer be concealed from the public.

What the CIA brought to the table was not some new interest in extrajudicial vengeance – that was at the core of Assange's treatment from the outset – but the specific extrajudicial tools it excels in, such as abduction and murder.

Ultimately, calmer heads prevailed, even in the Trump administration, understanding that a sham "legal" process would better serve and conceal the war the US was waging against the efforts by Assange and WikiLeaks to bring greater transparency to state actions and accountability for state crimes.

The campaign to lock away Assange for life is being pursued as enthusiastically by the Biden administration as it was earlier under Trump.

And the UK courts, including the highest in the land, have been actively colluding in this charade of justice.

CIA score-settling

Doubtless, we are now learning of the CIA's plots against Assange in part because there has been a change of administrations. Presumably, some of this is driven by score-settling from disaffected agents against Mike Pompeo, Trump's CIA director.

The revelations, after all, are not coming from whistleblowers concerned about justice for Assange. They are being mediated through the CIA community, officials with an intelligence agency mindset that views Assange in the same self-serving terms as Pompeo – as "a non-state hostile intelligence service". Like Pompeo, these officials see Assange as a "transparency terrorist".

But what is worthy of note is the fact that Yahoo is the news service delivering us these disclosures.

Three newspapers with huge readerships and vast resources, The New York Times, The Guardian and The Washington Post, all worked closely with Assange on WikiLeaks' early releases, raking in big profits from the earth-shattering leaks he provided.

All three papers should have a vested interest in ensuring that Assange is not extradited to the US and locked away for life on the pretext that his journalism amounts to espionage, as both the Trump and Biden administrations are claiming.

And perhaps most relevant of all, the three newspapers have long records of drawing on their extensive contacts inside the intelligence services, often allowing themselves to be used to peddle misinformation and psy-ops.

Remember, for example, that it

was The New York Times' reporters Judith Miller and Michael R. Gordon who became the US intelligence services' favored conduit for the weapons-of-mass-destruction deceptions that provided the rationale for the US to attack, occupy and dismember Iraq.

In the UK, The Guardian has been growing ever closer to the intelligence services since it broke with Assange and Glenn Greenwald, the reporter who brought it the Edward Snowden revelations that the US national security state was conducting illegal mass surveillance of the public.

Media silence

So how is it that these newspapers, with their wide-ranging sources inside the intelligence community and their historic investment in the Assange case, heard not a peep about this story over the past four years? Is it possible that not one of the 30 or so officials who spoke to Yahoo has also spoken to these newspapers? Why is Yahoo News the one breaking such an important story?

And maybe even more to the point, how is it that these three newspapers have all but ignored Yahoo's investigation, and so far appear to be doing nothing to follow it up?

The Guardian could barely stifle a yawn as it covered the story as an extended brief online (and offered a slightly fuller report for its Australian readers). But at least it mentioned the story. I have been unable to find any coverage in either The New York Times or The Washington Post.

Is the fact that large numbers of senior US officials are admitting that their agency seriously thought about abducting or murdering a journalist these publications worked with on some of the biggest stories of the modern age not hugely newsworthy for them?

But all of this indifference or aversion to reporting on Assange's horrifying plight is par for the course for these respected, supposedly liberal media outlets.

Like the rest of the corporate media, they have largely ignored the extradition proceedings going on in the UK courts over the past year and which are due to reach their climax next month when a final hearing is expected.

The media's continuing silence can only be understood as complicity in the persecution of a fellow journalist.

Colluding with power

The Guardian's failings have been particularly egregious, as I have documented before. The paper has barely concealed its vendetta against Assange – much of it following a falling out with him after one of its senior reporters recklessly exposed a WikiLeaks password to a cache of classified documents that has been exploited by Washington in building its so-called espionage case against Assange.

The Guardian has a vested interest – one it has not disclosed – in keeping the spotlight on Assange rather than allowing it to shift to its own role.

That is the context for interpreting its pitifully false and malicious story – again provided by intelligence services – tying Assange to a supposed conspiracy between Trump and the Kremlin that has been obsessively advanced by the liberal media.

The Guardian's report that a Trump aide, Paul Manafort, and unidentified "Russians" repeatedly visited Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy, one of the most heavily surveilled spots in the world, without leaving a single trace of their presence should never have made it into print. The simplest checks would have raised dozens of red flags. But the paper has chosen silence rather than correcting or withdrawing the story.

The only conclusion one can draw from their behavior is that the liberal media, far from being watchdogs on power, regard themselves as adjuncts of power. They feel much closer to the countries' secret, duplicity-dealing, murderous intelligence services than they do to a fellow journalist being hounded into permanent incarceration.

Net widens

The Yahoo report makes clear too that the surveillance operation against Assange and WikiLeaks intensified dramatically after Snowden released his confidential documents in 2013 in collaboration with reporter Glenn Greenwald.

The Snowden files showed that the US had begun expanding its ambition to use new digital technology to covertly surveil the rest of the world. Now it was increasingly turning that technological prowess inwards to covertly surveil its own population.

A transparency organisation like WikiLeaks, it quickly became obvious, was a major threat to the US intelligence services' plans.

According to Yahoo's sources, it was the Obama administration that began surveilling WikiLeaks more intensively and threw the net wider to expose its networks.

The CIA was already centrally involved, creating a special "WikiLeaks team" that worked closely with other friendly spy agencies – including one can presume the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing states that also comprise Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. (One official, William Evanina, who recently retired as a top US counterintelligence official, notes the key role the Five Eyes group played in Assange's case.)

The goal, Yahoo was told by Evanina, its main named source, was to "tie [WikiLeaks] back to hostile state intelligence services". In other words, the aim was to suggest not that Assange was interested in transparency or acting out of principle but that he wanted to undermine the US on behalf of a hostile foreign power.

Assange's fate was sealed within the Obama administration in the summer of 2016 when WikiLeaks released a cache of Democratic Party emails that cast Obama's chosen successor, Hillary Clinton, in a damning light and showed that the party had rigged its election procedures to stop her main challenger, Bernie Sanders, from winning.

As an aside, the Yahoo report notes that the idea of kidnapping Assange – in violation of Ecuador and the UK's sovereignty – actually preceded Pompeo's arrival at the CIA.

Despite Yahoo's focus on Pompeo, it was actually Obama and the Democratic Party's thirst for vengeance that paved the way for Trump's appointee to have viable options of either prosecuting Assange for espionage or abducting him.

Obama's officials immediately tarred Assange as conspiring with Donald Trump, Clinton's rival for the presidential election. He was thereby dragged into an establishment conspiracy theory, Russiagate, that claimed Trump was serving as a puppet of the Kremlin.

Given the many years, spent under both Obama and Trump, trying to shore up this claim by the most digitally advanced states in the world, it comes as something of a surprise to learn that they came up with nothing.

Evidence of WikiLeaks' collusion with Russia appears never to have surfaced, even though it became an implicit, driving assumption behind the Russiagate claims.

One unusually honest official, Robert Litt, a former general counsel of the Office of the Director for National Intelligence, observed to Yahoo of the claims made by Pompeo that Assange was acting on behalf of the Russians: "Based on the information that I had seen, I thought he was out over his skis on that".

Special Counsel Robert Mueller found no evidence to back up such a claim. The extradition hearings in London made no plausible case for it either.

The only tangible piece of evidence is The Guardian's Manafort story mentioned earlier, which proved so embarrassingly ridiculous everyone involved has tried to quietly forget about it.

House of cards

If Assange and WikiLeaks really were working hand in glove with the Kremlin, it is hard to imagine that no trace of that collusion was ever found.

Instead, Washington built much of its espionage case against Assange on the testimony of Sigurdur Thordarson, a convicted pedophile and financial fraudster, as well as an FBI asset. He now admits his testimony was a fabrication, and that he lied after he was promised immunity from prosecution.

The entire case against Assange has been shown to be a house of cards.

Interestingly, Yahoo News' report shows that, despite the void of evidence, US Justice Department officials were keen to concoct a "legal" case to forestall two dangers that might undermine their efforts to keep Assange incarcerated and preclude them from launching a credible prosecution.

The first was the CIA's unhinged scenarios that included rendition or a possible Hollywood-style gun battle on the streets of London to prevent Ecuador from helping Assange escape the embassy. Were the CIA to be successful, Justice Department officials fretted, Assange might arrive in the US without any formal or plausible charges levelled against him.

The other was that the UK was rapidly running out of pretexts to keep Assange locked out of view, after police had been allowed to drag him from the embassy in early 2019. (Ecuador's new president had changed official policy on sheltering Assange, shortly after the IMF agreed an enormous $4.2 billion loan.)

Sweden had already dropped its investigation of Assange in May 2017. So, Assange was moved to Belmarsh maximum-security prison on charges relating to a minor bail infraction. Those charges ignored the fact that he had violated his bail conditions only because he was seeking political asylum, as recognised in international law.

The UK judge issued the maximum sentence possible for such an infraction, giving the US time to formulate the espionage case that has provided the pretext for keeping him locked up ever since, in conditions during a pandemic that have put his life at risk.

British collusion

Did the UK conspire with the US in all this? The massive police presence around the embassy; the British government's illegal threats to invade Ecuador's embassy; the original, highly irregular ruling on extradition; the threatening emails from state prosecutors to Sweden; the complicity in holding Assange in a maximum-security prison in London on a debatable bail infraction; and the known role of the Five Eyes group of which the UK is a key member, all strongly suggest it was.

Yahoo reports:

"Former officials differ on how much the UK government knew about the CIA's rendition plans for Assange, but at some point, American officials did raise the issue with their British counterparts".

In other words, yes, the UK did know about the most unlawful parts of the CIA's plans. The question is only how closely was it involved.

One former counter-intelligence official observed:

"There was a discussion with the Brits about turning the other cheek or looking the other way when a team of guys went inside and did a rendition. But the British said, 'No way, you're not doing that on our territory, that ain't happening.' "

The UK could not afford to look publicly complict in illegal US actions that would have treated the streets of London no differently from those of Mogadishu. Instead, all the evidence suggests that Britain conspired repeatedly over a decade to help the US turn its illegal campaign against Assange and WikiLeaks into a seemingly "lawful" extradition process through the courts.

Again, according to Yahoo:

"White House officials developed a backup plan: The British would hold Assange on a bail jumping charge, giving Justice Department prosecutors a 48-hour delay to rush through an indictment".

In other words, the UK explicitly followed US instructions in holding Assange over a minor bail infraction.

Evanina confirmed the UK's collusion with the US efforts to keep Assange permanently incarcerated, telling Yahoo that the pair developed a "joint plan" to prevent Assange from being able to walk free from the embassy.

Terrifying truth

The truth is that, appalling as the Yahoo News revelations are, they fail to convey the reality that the US could count on multiple states, not least the UK, to conspire in providing a "legal" veneer to a decade-long, covert war against Assange and WikiLeaks for exposing US war crimes.

Even more frightening, all the evidence suggests that the US was also able to manipulate the legal processes in both Sweden and the UK to engineer Assange's effective incarceration all that time, and to this day.

And even more terrifying, the same evidence suggests that the establishment media in several countries could be relied on, at best, to turn a blind eye to a fellow journalist's persecution and, at worst, to actively conspire in that persecution.

Yahoo News provided a great service in bringing some of the reality about Assange's persecution to light. But there is much more to unearth. Sadly, our supposed watchdogs on power appear far too busy feeding at the trough to start sniffing out more of the truth.■

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Is this yellow package a food ration or a bomb?

Hazardous confusions in the US War on Terror

Voltairine MacFadyen

In her chapter on Afghanistan in *The WikiLeaks Files* book[1], Phyllis Bennis recounts an incident: *"Shortly after the bombing of Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001, the United States embarked on a major propaganda driven exercise, air-dropping individual food packets wrapped in bright yellow in isolated parts of the country"*. However, *"the problem was that the same bright yellow plastic was used to wrap bomblets contained in the cluster bombs that US war planes were dropping on Afghanistan"*.

Yes. There was a risk that Afghan people who ran to yellow packages hoping to find food would come across unexploded bombs instead.

According to experts in humanitarian crisis assistance, air drops of food are a suboptimal strategy, but, as Bennis notes, *"they look good on CNN"*.

Civilian or 'Enemy combatant'?

Two types of packages are dropped by US planes, both of which are yellow. One type aims to kill 'the bad guys', the other intends to help "oppressed people of Afghanistan"[2] yet it puts them at risk. The fact that one type of yellow package risks being mistaken for the other does not seem to be much of a concern to its 'sender'. Neither does the fact that innocent people risk being killed instead of 'the bad guys'.

This *acte-manqué* tragically prefigured what was to be not a bug but a feature of the US War on Terror, during which an estimated 335,000 civilians died violently. By April 2021, more than 71,000 Afghan and Pakistani civilians were estimated to have died[3] – in air strikes, crossfires, on landmines, at gunpoint, killed by US military, allies, or insurgents. There were cases of mistaken identities involving kidnapping, torture, incarceration. Men suspected of being 'enemy combatants' were stripped of their names, their human rights, and left to rot in Guantanamo – an abomination the US has yet to close down.

Road to peace or road to war?

Ex-private Chelsea Manning hoped for a change of course when, in 2010, she uploaded military documents to WikiLeaks' website to blow the whistle on US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. Julian Assange and WikiLeaks saw the public interest of these documents, as did many journalists around the world who collaborated and reported on the releases. If the road to war was paved with lies, good intentions and 'yellow packages', could the road to peace be paved with leaked documents, investigative journalism, public debate and good policies?

Assange hoped that the Afghan War Logs would influence policy positively with their content and timely publication: *"These files are the most comprehensive description of a war to be published during the course of a war – in other words, at a time when they still have a chance of doing some good"*.[4]

They didn't. War went on, both whistleblower and journalist were persecuted.

In September 2021, upon the US exiting Afghanistan, the last drone strike killed ten civilians, seven of whom were children.

Women's rights or the weaponisation of feminism?

With the US leaving and the Taliban retaking the country, there was great concern across Europe for the fate of Afghan women – a sentiment the CIA previously sought to exploit.

Indeed, in 2010, the CIA feared "public apathy" would not suffice to secure ongoing support from US allies in Afghanistan. In a classified analysis published by WikiLeaks[5], the CIA details PR strategies designed to shore up public support in ISAF partner countries for a continued war in Afghanistan. In France, they suggested advocating for Afghan women's rights – a matter dear to the French – thus helping to paint the war as a just cause in their eyes.

The CIA analysis reads:

"Afghan women could serve as ideal messengers in humanizing the ISAF role in combating the Taliban because of women's ability to speak personally and credibly about their experiences under the Taliban, their aspirations for the future, and their fears of a Taliban victory."

This is weaponisation of feminism; playing the feminism card in order to serve a war agenda.

Just as advocating for women's rights was suggested in bad faith, in 2021 it is an *"an insult to suggest that abandoning Afghan women and civil society to an army of theocrats is a defense of their self-determination"*.[6] – contrary to Biden's pretense that Afghan people now have the latitude to *"decide their future and how they want to run their country"*.

Talking about giving a voice to Afghan women, here is Malalai Joya about the WikiLeaks founder: *"He is a hero. In my view, he exposed the 'wrong' policies, the disgusting policies of the US government and Nato. Now he's living in the hearts of all the justice-loving people"*.[7]

He is also barely surviving in a maximum security prison in the UK.

Justice or revenge?

Biden recently clarified that the US did not go to war in Afghanistan to nation-build:

"The United States did what we went to do in Afghanistan: to get the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 and to deliver justice to Osama Bin Laden, and to degrade the terrorist threat to keep Afghanistan from becoming a base (...) We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build. And it's the right and the responsibility of the Afghan people alone to decide their future and how they want to run their country".[8]

The goals were National Security and Justice. In Bush's words[9]:

"Our military action is also designed to clear the way for sustained, comprehensive and relentless operations to drive them [the terrorists] out and bring them to justice".

But what justice?

Osama Bin Laden was delivered justice by being delivered from his life. Since 2001, 'justice' at the hands of the US is increasingly equated with the plain and simple suppression of confirmed or alleged dissidents, as if it were the new norm in the "free world"; people literally erased from the surface of the Earth – assassinated, dehumanised, locked away in impenetrable prisons or closed courtrooms.

As Bennis notes, *"the war in Afghanistan was grounded in revenge, not justice"* and *"the option of recognizing the [9/11] attacks as an enormous crime against humanity that demanded not war but a globally collaborative response, relying on international law and a strengthened system of international justice, was never on the table"*.

Patriot and journalist or traitor and information terrorist?

After September 11, 2001, *"America immediately divided the world into Us and Them, everyone was either with Us or against Us"* observes exiled NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, who associates 9/11 with a great regret: *"[My country] could have treated terror not as the theological phenomenon it purported to be, but as the crime it was. It could have used this rare moment of solidarity to reinforce democratic values (...) Instead, it went to war"*.[10]

Although the charge of 'aiding-the-enemy' was dropped during Manning's court-martial trial in 2013, the inhumane treatments inflicted on her from the moment of her arrest establishes that, in the eyes of the military, she was with Them. It was revenge for betraying and humiliating the US. Similarly, after years of persecution, no sensible person can say the US indictment against Assange has anything to do with justice. For the US, he is not a journalist but an enemy who must be crushed. There were high level talks to assassinate him, as shown by recent revelations of CIA plans[11]. Shockingly, maybe they won't have to: years of justice denied, arbitrary detention, propaganda and public apathy may just end up killing him.

The "information and perception war"

There is always a war within the war: it is the "perception and information war". That is why a free press is so vital. To weigh in this "perception and information war" from a people's standpoint is at the core of Assange's vision and WikiLeaks' publishing – to empower people with true comprehensive knowledge of the facts that shape their destiny. So we can choose our future.

It is not too late to do good.■

1 See page 14
2 "At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food", Bush's Address to the Nation, 7 October 2001
3 *Costs of War*, Watson Institute/Brown University
4 *Der Spiegel*, 26 July 2010
5 'CIA report into shoring up Afghan war support in Western Europe', *WikiLeaks*, 26 March 2010
6 'Joe Biden and 'nation building' in Afghanistan', Matt Johnson, *Exponents*, July 2021
7 *The Independent*, 6 August 2021
8 Remarks by President Biden on the drawdown of US Forces in Afghanistan, 8 July 2021
9 see 3
10 *Permanent Record*, Edward Snowden, Macmillan 2019
11 See page 6

Key witness in Assange case admits to lies in indictment

A major witness in the United States' Department of Justice case against Julian Assange has admitted to fabricating key accusations in the indictment against the WikiLeaks founder.

Bjartmar Oddur Þeyr Alexandersson and Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson
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A major witness in the United States' Department of Justice case against Julian Assange has admitted to fabricating key accusations in the indictment against the WikiLeaks founder. The witness, who has a documented history with sociopathy and has received several convictions for sexual abuse of minors and wide-ranging financial fraud, made the admission in a newly published interview in Stundin where he also confessed to having continued his crime spree whilst working with the Department of Justice and FBI and receiving a promise of immunity from prosecution.

The man in question, Sigurdur Ingi Thordarson, was recruited by US authorities to build a case against Assange after misleading them to believe he was previously a close associate of his. In fact he had volunteered on a limited basis to raise money for WikiLeaks in 2010 but was found to have used that opportunity to embezzle more than $50,000 from the organisation. Julian Assange was visiting Thordarson's home country of Iceland around this time due to his work with Icelandic media and members of parliament in preparing the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative, a press freedom project that produced a parliamentary resolution supporting whistleblowers and investigative journalism.

The United States is currently seeking Assange's extradition from the United Kingdom in order to try him for espionage relating to the release of leaked classified documents. If convicted, he could face up to 175 years in prison. The indictment has sparked fears for press freedoms in the United States and beyond and prompted strong statements in support of Assange from Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, the editorial staff of the Washington Post and many others.

US officials presented an updated version of an indictment against him to a Magistrate court in London last summer. The veracity of the information contained therein is now directly contradicted by the main witness, whose testimony it is based on.

No instruction from Assange

The court documents refer to Mr Thordarson simply as "Teenager" (a reference to his youthful appearance rather than true age, he is 28 years old) and Iceland as "NATO Country 1" but make no real effort to hide the identity of either. They purport to show that Assange instructed Thordarson to commit computer intrusions or hacking in Iceland.

The aim of this addition to the indictment was apparently to shore up and support the conspiracy charge against Assange in relation to his interactions with Chelsea Manning. Those occurred around the same time he resided in Iceland and the authors of the indictment felt they could strengthen their case by alleging he was involved in illegal activity there as well. This activity was said to include attempts to hack into the computers of members of parliament and record their conversations.

In fact, Thordarson now admits to Stundin that Assange never asked him to hack or access phone recordings of MPs. His new claim is that he had in fact received some files from a third party who claimed to have recorded MPs and had offered to share them with Assange without having any idea what they actually contained. He claims he never checked the contents of the files or even if they contained audio recordings as his third party source suggested. He further admits the claim, that Assange had instructed or asked him to access computers in order to find any such recordings, is false.

Nonetheless, the tactics employed by US officials appear to have been successful as can be gleaned from the ruling of Magistrate Court Judge Vanessa Baraitser on January 4th of this year. Although she ruled against extradition, she did so purely on humanitarian grounds relating to Assange's health concerns, suicide risk and the conditions he would face in confinement in US prisons. With regards to the actual accusations made in the indictment, Baraitser sided with the arguments of the American legal team, including citing the specific samples from Iceland which are now seriously called into question.

Other misleading elements can be found in the indictment, and later reflected in the Magistrate's judgement, based on Thordarson's now admitted lies. One is a reference to Icelandic bank documents. The Magistrate court judgement reads: "It is alleged that Mr. Assange and Teenager failed a joint attempt to decrypt a file stolen from a "NATO country 1" bank".

Thordarson admits to Stundin that this actually refers to a well publicised event in which an encrypted file was leaked from an Icelandic bank and assumed to contain information about defaulted loans provided by the Icelandic Landsbanki. The bank went under in the fall of 2008, along with almost all other financial institutions in Iceland, and plunged the country into a severe economic crisis. The file was at this time, in summer of 2010, shared by many online who attempted to decrypt it for the public interest purpose of revealing what precipitated the financial crisis. Nothing supports the claim that this file was even "stolen" per se, as it was assumed to have been distributed by whistleblowers from inside the failed bank.

More deceptive language emerges in the aforementioned judgment where it states: "…he [Assange] used the unauthorised access given to him by a source, to access a government website of NATO country-1 used to track police vehicles".

This depiction leaves out an important element, one that Thordarson clarifies in his interview with Stundin. The login information was in fact his own and not obtained through any nefarious means. In fact, he now admits he had been given this access as a matter of routine due to his work as a first responder while volunteering for a search and rescue team. He also says Assange never asked for any such access.

Revealing chat logs

Thordarson spoke with a journalist from Stundin for several hours as he prepared a thorough investigative report into his activities that include never before published chat logs and new documents.

The chat logs were gathered by Thordarson himself and give a comprehensive picture of his communications whilst he was volunteering for WikiLeaks in 2010 and 2011. It entails his talks with WikiLeaks staff as well as unauthorised communications with members of international hacking groups that he got into contact with via his role as a moderator on an open IRC WikiLeaks forum, which is a form of live online chat. There is no indication WikiLeaks staff had any knowledge of Thordarson's contacts with aforementioned hacking groups, indeed the logs show his clear deception.

The communications there show a pattern where Thordarson is constantly inflating his position within WikiLeaks, describing himself as chief of staff, head of communications, No 2 in the organisation or responsible for recruits. In these communications Thordarson frequently asks the hackers to either access material from Icelandic entities or attack Icelandic websites with so-called DDoS attacks. These are designed to disable sites and make them inaccessible but not cause permanent damage to content.

Stundin cannot find any evidence that Thordarson was ever instructed to make those requests by anyone inside WikiLeaks. Thordarson himself is not even claiming that, although he explains this as something Assange was aware of or that he had interpreted it so that this was expected of him. How this supposed non-verbal communication took place he cannot explain.

Furthermore, he never explained why WikiLeaks would be interested in attacking any interests in Iceland, especially at such a sensitive time while they were in the midst of publishing a huge trove of US diplomatic cables as part of an international media partnership. Assange is not known to have had any grievances with Icelandic authorities and was in fact working with members of parliament in updating Iceland's freedom of press laws for the 21st century.

On the FBI radar

Thordarson's rogue acts were not limited to communications of that nature as he also admits to Stundin that he set up avenues of communication with journalists and had media pay for lavish trips abroad where he mispresented himself as an official representative of WikiLeaks.

Continued on page 12

Actors of a persecution

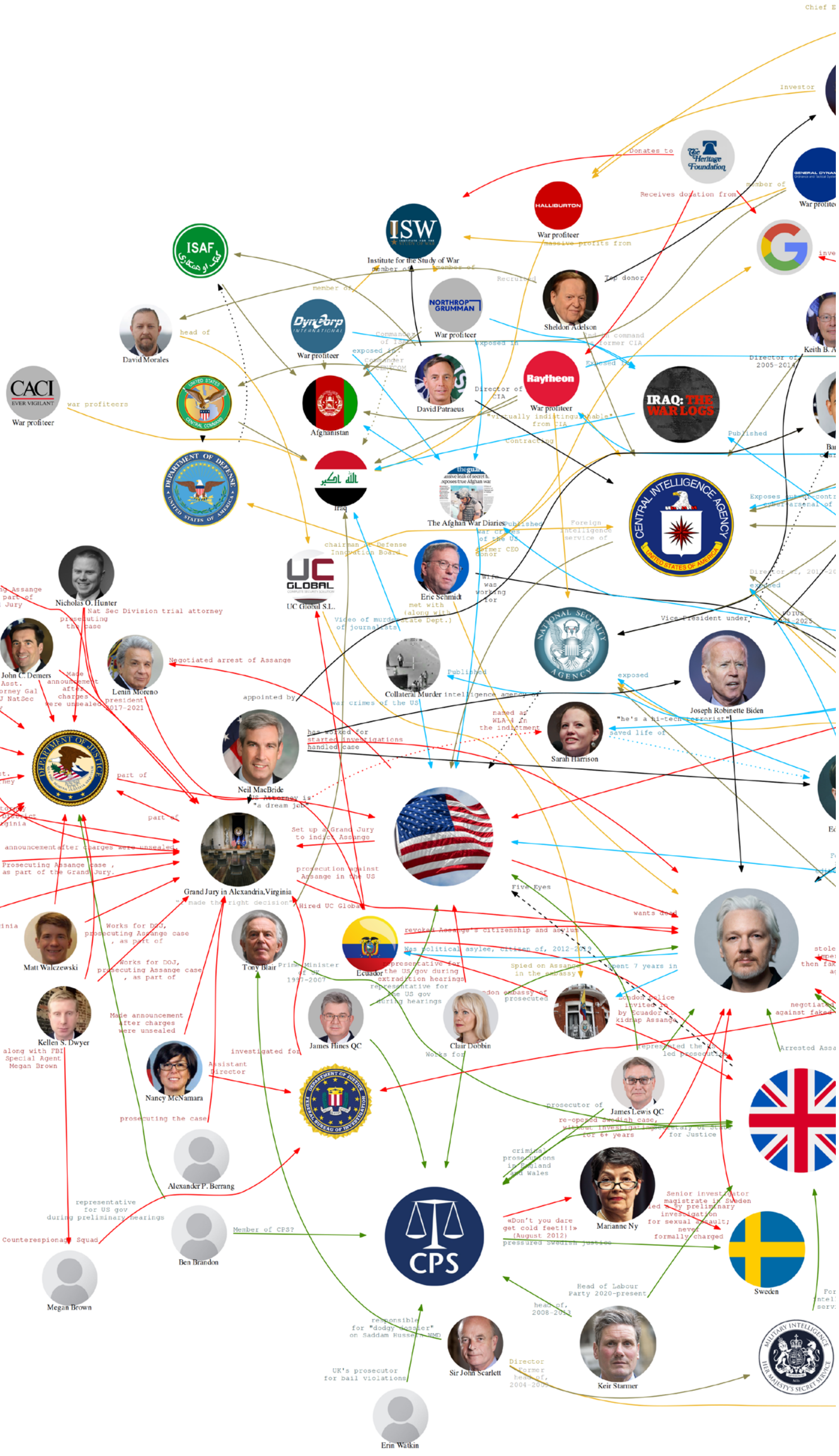
This map represents the web of actors, both institutional and individual, engaged in the persecution of Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks.
It is an art and research project collectively imagined and created on a wiki (participatory web site). It aims to illustrate in a visual way the great complexity of the decade long “slow-motion murder” of Assange, WikiLeaks and press freedom.

Data on the map is mostly aggregated from “open source” information detailing what is known about these actors, and links them together according to their common goals, relationships and hierarchies.

The use of colour attempts to differentiate the nature of these connections. However, such relationships are entangled in multiple and deeply ambiguous ways.

- WIKILEAKS
- WAR
- BUSINESS
- BRITISH POLITICS
- US POLITICS
- PROCEDURE

Join the effort! Participate in editing the wiki at challengepower.info



Chief Executive 1995-2000
Dick Cheney
Vice-President of
George W. Bush
POTUS 2001-2009
Donald Trump
POTUS 2017-2021
War profiteer
exposed in
Clinton POTUS 1993-2001
Bill Clinton
investor
Director of, 1999-2005
Director of, 2005-2009
Michael Hayden
Stratfor
Your World. In Context.
Works for
Exposed by
exposed over 5M emails from
Keith B. Alexander
POTUS 2009-2017
Glogal Intelligence Files
Published
IQT
IN·Q·TEL
Owned by
Chief of Staff 1998-2001
John Podesta
founder and member of the Board
Campaign Director for
Director of, 2013-2017
John Brennan
Published emails from
GITMO FILES
Barack Obama
charged
charged
Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State 2009-2013
VAULT 7
Vault 7
Published
Director of, 2009-2013
appointed by
Leon Panetta
alleged source of
Jeremy Hammond
alleged source of
Josh Shulte
"seriously damaging the CIA"
PayPal
Shed light on campaign of
Center for American Progress
Published
The Podesta Emails
The Podesta emails
alleged source of
Chelsea Manning
Published
Hillary Clinton email archive
The WikiLeaks Threat
exposed the endless wars of
protected by
WikiLeaks
Palantir
War profiteer
Exposed by
Banking Blockade against
Bank of America
"WikiLeaks is a non state hostile intelligence agency" (2017)
Edward Snowden
coordinated plots to kidnap or assassinate
Secretary of State 2018-2021
spoke at roundtable hosted by
Director of, 1993-1995
Mike Pompeo
Exposed by
HBGary
Subsdiary of
ManTech
Securing the Future
War profiteer
International patron
R. James Woolsey Jr.
Founder, former editor-in-chief of
PLUS D
Cablegate
Volunteered for
recruits former NSA
recruits former CIA
partner with
DARKTRACE
Banking blockade against Wikileaks
recruits former MI5
MasterCard
WESTERN UNION
stole, defauded impersonated, then faked testimony against
Sigurdur Ingi 'Siggi' Thordarson
partners with the NSA
Published
Spy Files
negotiated immunity against faked testimony to
GCHQ
providing signals intelligence (SIGINT)
HJS
Henry Jackson Society
Signed Assange extradition order
Home Secretary, 2018-2019
Sajid Javid,secretary of state
in 2018, HJS had staffer working in the office of then home secretary
"Amounts to criminal act.."
High Court judge
Alex Carlile
receives financial benefits from
Exposed by
THALES
Associate Director 2011-2018, speaker
Douglas Murray
former Minister for Defence Procurement
oversaw extradition of
Domestic Intelligence Agency
Mother of
MI5
Director
vice-president
Alexander Arbuthnot
main judge in extradition case
oversees Judge Baraitser
Judge Emma Arbuthnot
Chief magistrate
Father of
is member of
Head chair of the advisory board of
Judge Vanessa Baraitser
UK judge at Magistrates Court
Secretary of State for the Home Dept.
Priti Patel
Husband of
Director
Baron James Arbuthnot
allegedly independant from
Foreign intelligence service of
Director of
SC Strategy Limited
UK judiciary
Judge Snow
Judge Taylor

Curious eyes never run dry

Key witness in Assange case admits to lies in indictment

Continued from page 9

He also admits that he stole documents from WikiLeaks staff by copying their hard drives. Among those were documents from Renata Avila, a lawyer who worked for the organisation and Mr. Assange.

Thordarson continued to step up his illicit activities in the summer of 2011 when he established communication with "Sabu", the online moniker of Hector Xavier Monsegur, a hacker and a member of the rather infamous LulzSec hacker group. In that effort all indications are that Thordarson was acting alone without any authorisation, let alone urging, from anyone inside WikiLeaks.

What Thordarson did not know at the time was that the FBI had arrested Sabu in the beginning of June 2011 and threatened him into becoming an informant and a collaborator for the FBI. Thus, when Thordarson continued his previous pattern of requesting attacks on Icelandic interests, the FBI knew and saw an opportunity to implicate Julian Assange.

Later that month a DDoS attack was performed against the websites of several government institutions.

That deed was done under the watchful eyes of the FBI who must have authorised the attack or even initiated it, as Sabu was at that point their man. What followed was an episode where it seems obvious that Icelandic authorities were fooled into cooperation under false pretenses.

Ögmundur Jónasson was Interior Minister at the time and as such the political head of police and prosecution, and says of the US activities: "They were trying to use things here [in Iceland] and use people in our country to spin a web, a cobweb that would catch Julian Assange".

Jónasson recalls that when the FBI first contacted Icelandic authorities on June 20th 2011 it was to warn Iceland of an imminent and grave threat of intrusion against government computers. A few days later FBI agents flew to Iceland and offered formally to assist in thwarting this grave danger. The offer was accepted and on July 4th a formal letter of request was sent to Iceland to seal the mutual assistance. Jónasson speculates that already then the US was laying the groundwork for its ultimate purpose, not to assist Iceland but entrap Julian Assange:

"What I have been pondering ever since is if the spinning of the web had already started then with the acceptance of the letter of request establishing cooperation that they could use as a pretext for later visits," says Jónasson.

Icelandic policemen were sent to the US to gather further evidence of this so-called imminent danger and Jónasson says he does not recall anything of substance coming out of that visit and no further attacks were made against Icelandic interests.

But the FBI would return.

Icelandic officials deceived by the US

Towards the end of August, Thordarson was being pursued by WikiLeaks staff who wished to locate the proceeds of online sales of WikiLeaks merchandise. It emerged Thordarson had instructed the funds be sent to his private bank account by forging an email in the name of Julian Assange.

Thordarson saw a way out and on August 23 sent an email to the US Embassy in Iceland offering information in relation to a criminal investigation. He was replied to with a call and confirmed that he was offering to be an informant in the case against Julian Assange.

The prosecutors and FBI were quick in responding and within 48 hours a private jet landed in Reykjavik with around eight agents who quickly set up meetings with Thordarson and with people from the Icelandic State Prosecutors office and the State Police Commissioner.

> **"Their argument was that if they could prove he was a criminal rather than a journalist the charges would stick, and that was where Thordarson's testimony would be key.**

At mid-day, Mr. Jónasson, then Interior Minister, got wind of this new visit and requested confirmation that this related to the same case as earlier in the summer. "I asked on what letter of request this visit was based and if this was exactly the same case", Jónasson says in an interview with Stundin. "I then found out that this was of a totally different nature than previously discussed". He says he put two and two together and said it was obvious that the intention was to lay a trap in Iceland for Assange and other staff members of WikiLeaks.

Such actions were, according to Jónasson, way outside the scope of the agreement and thus he ordered that all cooperation with the agents be stopped and that they would be informed they were acting in Iceland without any authority. Only days later he learned that the agents and prosecutors had not yet left the country, so the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the US embassy with the demand they halt police work in Iceland and leave the country.

They did, but left with the new informant and "star witness", Sigurdur Ingi Thordarson, who flew with them to Denmark.

Not a hacker but a sociopath

Thordarson has been nicknamed 'Siggi the hacker' in Iceland. That is actually an antonym, as several sources Stundin has talked to claim that Thordarson's computer skills are basic. This is supported by several chat logs and documents where he is requesting assistance from others doing rather uncomplicated computer jobs. Once, he even sought FBI expert help in uploading a video from his own phone.

The meeting in Denmark was the first of a few where the FBI enthusiastically embraced the idea of co-operation with Thordarson. He says they wanted to know everything about WikiLeaks, including the physical security of staff. They took material he had gathered, including data he had stolen from WikiLeaks employees and even planned to send him to England with a wire. Thordarson claimed in interviews he had refused that particular request. It was probably because he was not welcomed anymore as he knew WikiLeaks people had found out, or were about to firmly establish, that he had embezzled funds from the organisation.

After months of collaboration, the FBI seem to have lost interest. At about the same time charges were piling up against Thordarson with the Icelandic authorities for massive fraud, forgeries and theft on the one hand and for sexual violations against underage boys he had tricked or forced into sexual acts on the other.

After long investigations Thordarson was sentenced in 2013 and 2014 and received relatively lenient sentences as the judge took into account that he changed his plea at court and pleaded guilty to all counts.

According to a psychiatric assessment presented to the court Thordarson was diagnosed as a sociopath, incapable of remorse but still criminally culpable for his actions. He was assessed to be able to understand the basic difference between right and wrong; he just did not seem to care.

Incarceration did not seem to have an intended effect of stopping Thordarson from continuing his life of crime. It actually took off and expanded in extent and scope in 2019 when the Trump-era DoJ decided to revisit him, giving him a formal status as witness in the prosecution against Julian Assange and granting him immunity in return from any prosecution.

The New York Times Problem

In the month following Assange's arrest in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London on April 11th 2019 a new letter of request arrived at the Ministry of Justice in Iceland. This time the request was to take a formal statement from Thordarson in Iceland in the presence of his lawyer. The Ministry had a new political head at the time, who had limited knowledge of the prior history of the case.

Although the Department of Justice had spent extreme resources attempting to build a case against Julian Assange during the Obama presidency, they had decided against indicting Assange. The main concern was what was called "The New York Times Problem", namely that there was such a difficulty in distinguishing between WikiLeaks publications and NYT publications of the same material that going after one party would pose grave First Amendment concerns.

President Donald Trump's appointed Attorney general William Barr did not share these concerns, and neither did his Trump-appointed deputy Kellen S. Dwyer. Barr, who faced severe criticism for politicising the DoJ on behalf of the president, got the ball rolling on the Assange case once again. Their argument was that if they could prove he was a criminal rather than a journalist the charges would stick, and that was where Thordarson's testimony would be key.

In May 2019 Thordarson was offered an immunity deal, signed by Dwyer, that granted him immunity from prosecution based on any information of wrongdoing they had on him. The deal, seen in writing by Stundin, also guarantees that the DoJ would not share any such information with other prosecutorial or law enforcement agencies. That would include Icelandic ones, meaning that the Americans will not share information on crimes he might have committed threatening Icelandic security interests - and the Americans apparently had plenty of those but had over the years failed to share them with their Icelandic counterparts.

In any event, Assange has never been suspected of any wrongdoing in Iceland. Stundin has seen confirmation of this from the District Prosecutor in Iceland, the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police. Assange has no entry in the LÖKE database of any police activity linked to an individual collected by the Icelandic State Police Commissioner from 2009-2021.

Assange's lawyer also asked the Icelandic Foreign Ministry whether the points in his updated indictment where Iceland is referred to as 'NATO country 1' meant that his case had any relevance to Icelandic membership to NATO, the bilateral defense agreement between USA and Iceland or any national security interests. All such connections were dismissed in a reply from the defense attaché at the Ministry.

Immunity and a new crime spree

According to information obtained by Stundin the immunity deal between the DoJ and Thordarson was presented at the Headquarters of the Reykjavik police where the only role of the Icelandic policeman was to confirm the identity of Thordarson before leaving him alone with his lawyer in the back room where he met the US delegation.

It is as if the offer of immunity, later secured and sealed in a meeting in DC, had encouraged Thordarson to take bolder steps in crime. He started to fleece individuals and companies on a grander scale than ever; usually by either acquiring or forming legal entities he then used to borrow merchandise, rent luxury cars, even order large quantities of goods from wholesalers without any intention to pay for these goods and services.■

Update

Sigurdur "Siggi" Thordarson was arrested in Reykjavík on September 24 and put in Iceland's highest security prison under a "rarely invoked" law that allows police in Iceland to detain someone considered to be in the middle of crime spree, Stundin reported.

Thordarson "was brought before a judge after police requested indefinite detention intended to halt an ongoing crime spree. The judge apparently agreed that Thordarson's repeated, blatant and ongoing offences against the law put him at high risk for continued re-offending," Stundin said.■

This is not about the law. It is about intimidating journalism; it's about suppressing press freedom; it's about protecting immunity for state officials — Assange's case has become impossible to ignore.

I would encourage journalists from all media outlets to look deeply into this case, assemble all the evidence and expose misconduct, because the public deserves to know the truth.

NILS MELZER,
UNITED NATIONS
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR
ON TORTURE

US press freedom bill would protect journalists facing persecution... but not Julian Assange

US senators say they want to protect foreign journalists from government aggression. But what happens when the US is the aggressor?

Rose Adams
First published on 8 September 2021 in The Intercept

Earlier this year, just days before World Press Freedom Day, Senators Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., joined forces to introduce the International Press Freedom Act of 2021, a bipartisan bill to protect at-risk journalists working in highly censored countries. The legislation is predicated on the idea that the United States is a uniquely safe place for journalists – but that notion doesn't always hold up under scrutiny.

Introduced on April 29, the International Press Freedom Act is one of at least three press freedom bills that Congress has considered since Saudi authorities killed journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018. But while other bills have proposed piecemeal protections – such as sanctions on restrictive governments or a government office for threatened journalists – Kaine and Graham's bill takes a more comprehensive approach. In addition to directing State Department funds toward investigating and prosecuting crimes against journalists abroad, the law would create a new visa category for threatened reporters and open a State Department office with a $30 million annual fund to help journalists report safely or relocate.

Press advocacy groups such as the Committee to Protect Journalists have praised Kaine and Graham's bill, claiming that the legislation would "bolster US foreign diplomacy on global press freedom". In a statement, Kaine emphasised the US's responsibility to spread its free speech ethos.

"Enshrined in both our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, press freedom is a core American value that we must constantly promote around the globe," he said in a press release. "With this bill, our country will let journalists know that we will protect their right to report and offer safe harbor when they are threatened".

But that safe harbor doesn't seem to apply to foreign journalists the US government itself has threatened. For years, the Justice Department has worked to extradite and prosecute WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for publishing Army war logs provided by Chelsea Manning in 2010, and increased the pressure following his 2016 publication leaked Democratic Party emails that the Justice Department said were hacked by Russia. And though the government's extradition efforts are inching closer to fruition amid several US appeals, Kaine and Graham have remained silent.

Assange sought refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in the UK but was arrested in 2019 on an extradition warrant under charges related to his 2010 publication of military documents. Assange's charges – which include one count of conspiracy to commit computer intrusion and 17 counts under the Espionage Act for exposing national defense information – could land him in prison for a maximum of 175 years.

Of Assange's many critics, Kaine and Graham have been some of the loudest. In the years since the publication of the military war logs and the Democratic National Committee's emails, the senators have taken to cable news to air their contempt. "[WikiLeaks] released classified information between our government and foreign leaders that embarrassed foreign leaders and our government," Graham said on CNN in 2017, after former President Donald Trump tweeted support for Assange. "So Mr. Assange is a fugitive from the law hiding in an embassy who has a history of undermining American interests".

Kaine, whose vice presidential hopes may have been hampered by the 2016 email leak, celebrated Assange's arrest in 2019. "It's something that we expected, we knew the day would come, and justice has to be done," he told CNN anchors in 2019. "The thing that I'm most interested in is, when you get to the bottom of this story, how do we learn enough to protect sensitive information from vandals like Julian Assange?" (Graham, meanwhile, tweeted his approval of the arrest.)

Over a year after Assange's detainment, England's High Court held a series of hearings about his case, which culminated in a January 2021 ruling that blocked Assange's extradition. But in August, the court expanded the grounds on which the US could appeal the decision, flooding the court with a wave of appeals. (The UK's extradition procedure requires British prosecutors to represent the US in court, meaning that UK taxpayers are footing the prosecution's bill.)

"It's clear they're out to get him," said Chip Gibbons, policy director for Defending Rights & Dissent, who has covered Assange's case for Jacobin. "It's fine to offer visas to persecuted journalists, but ... it's immensely hypocritical for the US to do this at the same time it is seeking to extradite Julian Assange".

> **"Press freedom advocates, while supportive of the press freedom bill, said that the legislation would yield the biggest impact if the United States followed its own policies.**

Assange isn't the only publisher or whistleblower the bill sponsors have targeted. Graham, one of the loudest critics of government leakers in Congress, championed the imprisonment of Edward Snowden and slammed Obama for commuting Manning's prison sentence in 2017. Kaine has occasionally taken a softer stance, although he also opposed Manning's commutation and said that Reality Winner "has got to suffer the consequences" for leaking a classified document pertaining to the 2016 election. Still, the senators bemoaned the number of journalists imprisoned worldwide in the press release for their bill.

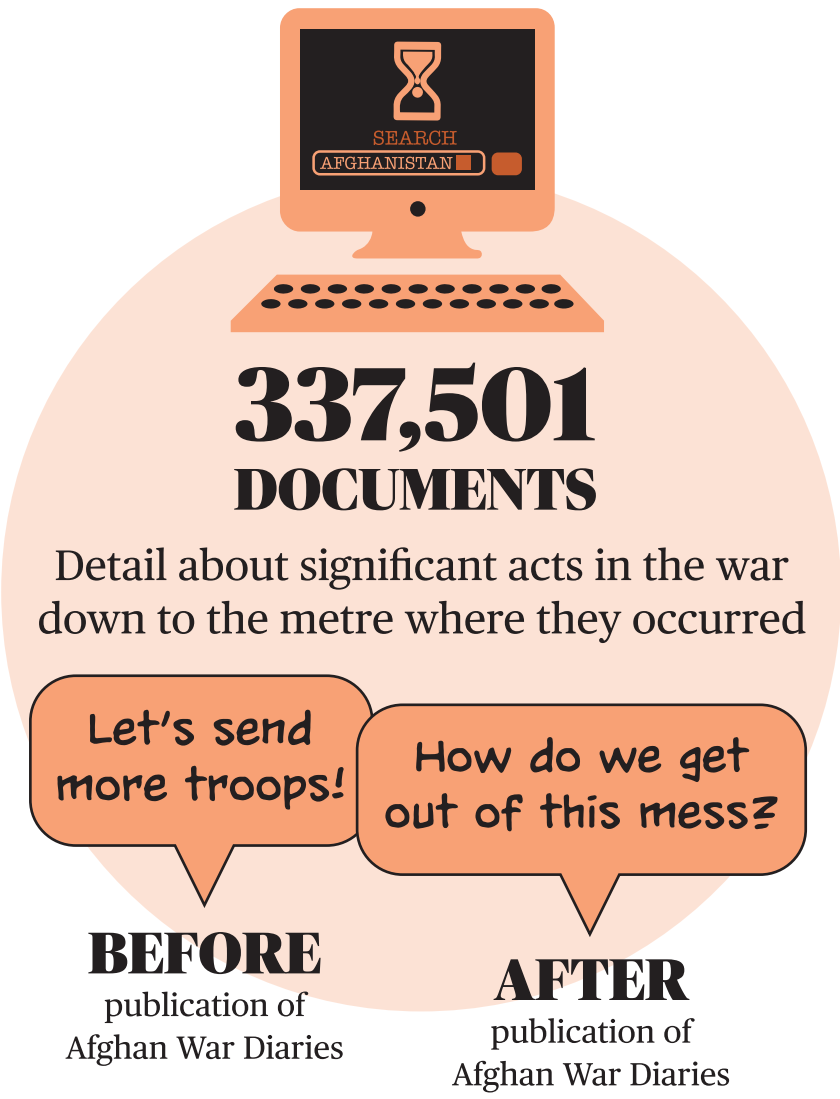
A spokesperson for Kaine said that he introduced the International Press Freedom Act because of his "long-standing support for human rights inspired by Kaine's long-standing support for human rights ... and in particular his outrage over the death of Jamal Khashoggi" but did not answer questions about Assange's extradition. Representatives for Graham and Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., a co-sponsor of the bill who has also voiced support for Assange's extradition, did not respond to requests for comment.

And press freedom advocates, while supportive of the press freedom bill, said that the legislation would yield the biggest impact if the US followed its own policies.

"Anytime we, or the US government, or members of Congress are talking about press freedom internationally, it's, in my mind, a good thing," said Trevor Timm, co-founder and executive director of the Freedom of the Press Foundation. "But for any of that advocacy to be remotely effective, it's important for the US to walk the walk and not just talk the talk". ■

> **We now know that this unprecedented criminal case was launched in part because of the genuinely dangerous plans that the CIA was considering. This provides all the more reason for the Biden Justice Department to find a quiet way to end this case.**
>
> BEN WIZNER, DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION'S SPEECH, PRIVACY AND TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

The WikiLeaks Files: Afghanistan



Phyllis Bennis
Excerpt from The Wikileaks Files
Published in 2015

Civilians in the war

There were a lot of expert killers in Afghanistan. The Afghan War Diary did not reveal a war different to that which we knew, but they provided a level of corroborating detail, often in clinically detached language. The huge number of civilian casualties was a known feature of the US war in Afghanistan from the beginning. The attacks on civilians have remained a huge crisis in the Afghanistan war – but much of the detail remained hidden. Just three weeks after Barack Obama was sworn in as president, in February 2009, WikiLeaks released a confidential NATO report revealing that civilian deaths in Afghanistan had increased by 46 percent during 2008.

According to the WikiLeaks introduction, the report *"shows a dramatic escalation of the war and civil disorder"*. Attacks on US and NATO troops increased significantly, including a 27 percent rise in IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attacks, a 40 percent rise in rifle and rocket fire, and a 67 percent increase in surface-to-air fire against Coalition aircraft. All of that resulted in an increase in US/NATO military deaths of 35 percent, while kidnappings and assassinations rose by 50 percent, and attacks on the US-backed Afghan government more than doubled, rising by a massive 119 percent. In the meantime, the report documents that only half of the families outside Kabul had access to even basic healthcare, and only half of the children had any access to a school.

But the report – drafted by the Pentagon's Central Command, officially as the "International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan" (ISAF) – was kept secret, designated "For Official Use Only". One of the reasons it was kept secret may have been that the Pentagon's count of the rise in civilian deaths – 46 percent higher than the year before – was significantly higher even than the 40 percent escalation calculated by the United Nations.

From its beginning, the US war in Afghanistan included official reliance on torture, official violations of human rights and international covenants, official disdain for human dignity, official contempt for Afghan cultural norms, and more. US troops and their local allies did not necessarily treat detainees or civilians worse than in earlier wars (the infamous tiger cages where the US-backed South Vietnamese government held prisoners offer one comparison), but the global war on terror certainly went further in justifying such treatment, in many cases virtually bragging about it. In the summary of a 2008 report revealed in the Afghan War Diary, the analysis of congressional engagement with the issues of interrogation and torture, including the so-called "McCain Amendment," takes as a matter of course the category of "enemy combatants" and "terrorist suspects" detained by US troops, without any indication that the very terms were designed as part of a conscious strategy to disregard the obligations imposed by the Geneva Conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners:

Controversy has arisen regarding US treatment of enemy combatants and terrorist suspects detained in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations, and whether such treatment complies with US statutes and treaties such as the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Congress approved additional guidelines concerning the treatment of detainees via the Detainee Treatment Act (DTA), which was enacted pursuant to both the Department of Defense, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations to Address Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, and Pandemic Influenza Act, 2006 (PL 109-148, Title X), and the National Defense Authorisation Act for FY2006 (PL 109-163, Title XIV). Among other things, the DTA contains provisions that (1) require Department of Defense (DOD) personnel to employ United States Army Field Manual guidelines while interrogating detainees, and (2) prohibit the "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of persons under the detention, custody, or control of the United States Government". These provisions of the DTA, which were first introduced by Senator John McCain, have popularly been referred to as the "McCain Amendment". This report discusses the McCain Amendment, as modified and subsequently enacted into law. [CRS-RL33655]

In another section, the report provides a reminder of Bush's plan to veto any congressional effort to hold the CIA accountable to the same public standards that the Pentagon was supposed to follow in the Army Field Manual. Those standards, however consistently they were violated, were at least officially designed to meet the requirements of the Geneva Conventions. They were far more restrictive than the official standards of the CIA's interrogation techniques, which blatantly included torture but insisted on its denial:

Finally, this report briefly describes legislation introduced in the 110th Congress that references interrogation standards or requirements initially established by the McCain Amendment. Discussed legislation includes HR 2082, the Intelligence Authorisation Act for Fiscal Year 2008, which was vetoed by President Bush on March 8, 2008, and HR 4156, the Orderly and Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act, 2008, which was passed by the House on November 14, 2007, but has not been considered by the Senate due to the failure to invoke cloture on the bill. Both bills proposed to bar the CIA and other intelligence agencies from employing any interrogation tactic that is not authorised by the Army Field Manual, effectively prohibiting these agencies from employing certain harsh interrogation techniques, including waterboarding, regardless of whether those techniques had otherwise been deemed legally permissible. The White House has indicated that the President shall veto any legislation requiring the CIA to use only those interrogation techniques authorised under the Army Field Manual.

> **"From its beginning, the US war in Afghanistan included official reliance on torture, official violations of human rights and international covenants, official disdain for human dignity...**

The cost of war

Opposition to the war in Afghanistan grew – gradually at first, then faster – from the first months of the US invasion and occupation. While casualties (US casualties, at least – unfortunately Afghan casualties too rarely led to widespread opposition) played a role in the rising public outrage about the war, another important reason was its cost. Since October 2001, US taxpayers have paid about $715 billion for the war in Afghanistan alone. That translates into more than $10 million every hour – every day, every year since 2001.

And beyond the broad problem of paying for a war widely understood to be failing at its expressed goals, there were occasional bursts of indignation when it became clear that US taxpayer money – straight from the Pentagon's coffers – was helping to fund the Taliban insurgency. While that stark reality had been known in small circles before, WikiLeaks again provided detailed examples of how it worked. In physical terms, Afghanistan is an extraordinarily isolated country.

Landlocked and surrounded by mountains, half a world away from the United States, building up and supplying an occupying army of up to 150,000 US and NATO troops at any given moment was a logistical nightmare. With goods either trucked in over the Pakistani border to face long and dangerous drives to Kabul and beyond, or flown in at huge expense to Bagram Airbase outside of Kabul, provisioning and arming the hundreds of "Forward Operating Bases" scattered throughout the country required lots of local help. That meant hiring local transport companies, and it also meant paying for security. One 2007 cable describes just such a military contractor, a local Afghan trucking company with a striking name:

Four Horsemen International reported that they were approached by Taliban personnel to talk about payment for the safe passage of convoys through their area. The current price for passage is $500US per truck from Kandahar to Herat, $50US per truck from Kabul to Ghazni, $100US per truck from Ghazni to Orgun-E, and $200-300US per truck from Orgun-E to Wazi Kwah. All negotiations are conducted outside of Afghanistan with the Taliban POC located in Quetta, Pakistan. This information has been verified by other HNT companies and the other companies state they are paying money for safe passage. [CRS-RL33655]

The financial totals of up to $500 per truck paid to the Taliban (as well as other militias, some of them nominally supporters of the government) add up to hundreds of millions of dollars. Knowledge that these enormous sums were being paid to the Taliban, even as the ostensible justification for the US troops being in Afghanistan was the claimed need to wipe out the Taliban, played a significant role in reducing public support for the war. Counter-insurgency wars waged far from the home country of the occupying soldiers are never easy. When the United States prepared to attack Afghanistan in 2001, the country's language and culture remained unknown to the vast majority of troops and commanders being sent. When the war in Afghanistan began, it was clear that the Bush administration had no concern for or interest in the people, religion, traditions, culture, or anything else there. The original claim from Bush's secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and others, was that the war would be quick and tidy: the Taliban government would be overthrown, the new government created at the Bonn Conference in November 2001 would be helicoptered into Kabul to take over, the population would be grateful, and the work would be over. It

did not turn out quite like that. The quick war rather swiftly morphed into a long-term counter-insurgency war, with US and other NATO troops facing conditions in which ignorance of the local people and culture put the troops themselves, as well as the evanescent goals of the war, at serious risk. Realising that, several years into the war, the military began a project designed to embed academics – anthropologists, sociologists, and others – into military units in Afghanistan, to strengthen the capacity of the troops by providing cultural and social insight into Afghan society.

In August 2009, the Washington Post magazine documented the work of psychologists and anthropologists who joined the Pentagon's Human Terrain project. In the photos, the academics were dressed in camouflage and armed with standard weapons, indistinguishable from the regular soldiers. Their role in one "model" village, Pir Zadeh in southern Afghanistan, was described thus: *"They would drive in MRAPs, heavy, armored vehicles designed to minimise the effects of makeshift bombs, then would get out and move west through the village. The soldiers would create a secure perimeter as they walked ... Any villager who wanted to pass the patrol would have to enter the perimeter and be frisked for weapons"*. The Post acknowledged that few social scientists were willing to participate, but never asked the critical question of why that might be. It never questioned just whose village the perimeter-establishing soldiers thought it was. Though tragic, it certainly should not have surprised anyone that an earlier Human Terrain recruit, described as a "soldier and aid worker," had been fatally attacked while she was on patrol in a neighboring village. The attacker was captured, and the Human Terrain social scientist's Army Ranger partner *"pulled out his pistol and shot the man in the head"*. He pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to probation and a fine.

It was left to WikiLeaks to bring to light the "Human Terrain Team Handbook" – unclassified but kept from the public – with its description of who makes up those teams and what they are tasked with in carrying out counter-insurgency war. Official members of the military or not, their task is clear: to strengthen the US army's military operations:

Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) are five- to nine-person teams deployed by the Human Terrain System (HTS) to support field commanders by filling their cultural knowledge gap in the current operating environment and providing cultural interpretations of events occurring within their area of operations. The team is composed of individuals with social science and operational backgrounds that are deployed with tactical and operational military units to assist in bringing knowledge about the local population into a coherent analytic framework and build relationships with the local power-brokers in order to provide advice and opportunities to Commanders and staffs in the field...

Each team is recruited and trained for a specific region, then deployed and embedded with their supported unit. The HTTs are comprised of a mix of Soldiers and Department of the Army Contractors that provide a mix of senior military specialists and academicians with strong social sciences credentials. An HTT integrates into the unit staff, conducts unclassified open-source and field research, and provides operationally-relevant human terrain information in support of the planning, preparation, execution and assessment of operations.

A fundamental condition of irregular warfare and counter-insurgency operations is that the Commander and staff can no longer limit their focus to the traditional Mission, Enemy, Terrain and weather, friendly Troops and support available, and Time...

In an irregular warfare environment "Commanders and planners require insight into cultures, perceptions, values, beliefs, interests, and decision-making processes of individuals and groups" and should be evaluated according to their "society, social structure, culture, language, power and authority, and interests". The human dimension is the very essence of irregular warfare environments. Understanding local cultural, political, social, economic, and religious factors is crucial to successful counterinsurgency and stability operations, and ultimately, to success in the war on terror. In stability operations and irregular warfare, the human aspect of the environment becomes central to mission success. Information on social groups and their interests, beliefs, leaders, and the drivers of individual and group behavior is needed to conduct effective counterinsurgency operations. The expertise for conducting research and analysis to provide valid and objective information on these topics are highly specialised in the social sciences. Social science research of a host nation's population produces a knowledge base that is referred to as the Human Terrain, or "The element of the operational environment encompassing the cultural, sociological, political and economic factors of the local population".

The people of Afghanistan, then, had become an *"element of the operational environment"* of Washington's war.

The massacre of Dasht-E-Leili

The philosophy articulated in the Handbook saw massacres as an inevitable component of the US war. Of course, one of the most significant consequences of the release of the WikiLeaks papers was the detailed accounting of mass killing and other barbarities – actions that provide a shocking, though not surprising, prism for understanding the war. One such action, documented in excruciating detail, was the massacre, in just the first weeks after the US invasion of Afghanistan, of between 2,000 and 3,000 Taliban prisoners by US-backed Afghan soldiers. In many ways, the Dasht-e-Leili massacre would portend the continuing war crimes involving prisoners, torture, and attacks on civilians that would come to characterise the US "global war on terror" for at least the next twelve years.

While the cables are heavily redacted, they describe how *"hundreds or perhaps thousands"* of Taliban fighters had surrendered after brief fighting in Mazar-e Sharif and Konduz in November 2001, and were incarcerated in shipping containers to be transferred to US custody at Sheberghan Prison – a two-day journey from Dasht-e-Leili, where they had surrendered. But the metal shipping containers were sealed, and most of the prisoners suffocated before they arrived. Many were also shot through the walls of the sealed containers.

The killing of these prisoners represented a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions regarding protection of fighters who have surrendered. The kind of wanton disregard for human life shown in the killings should have led to immediate efforts to achieve accountability – including on the part of US forces.

Instead, the atrocity is described coolly, with significant attention to the efforts (it remains unclear whether it refers to efforts by Afghans or US or other NATO forces) to keep the focus on Taliban atrocities, as if these somehow excused the horror of the atrocities committed by US-backed Afghan forces.

The documents regarding the massacre refer, without detail, to "Dostum," or occasionally "General Dostum". The reference is to General Ahmad Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek warlord who had fought in Afghanistan first with the pro-Soviet Afghan government in the 1980s against the anti-Soviet mujahideen, and then joined the mujahideen fighters of the US-backed Northern Alliance, until they were beaten by the Taliban in the mid 1990s, at which point Dostum fled to comfortable exile. Dostum returned to Afghanistan with the US invasion forces in 2001, and with US backing reclaimed leadership as chief of staff of the Afghan military installed by the US, as well as simultaneously reconstituting his Uzbek-based private militia.

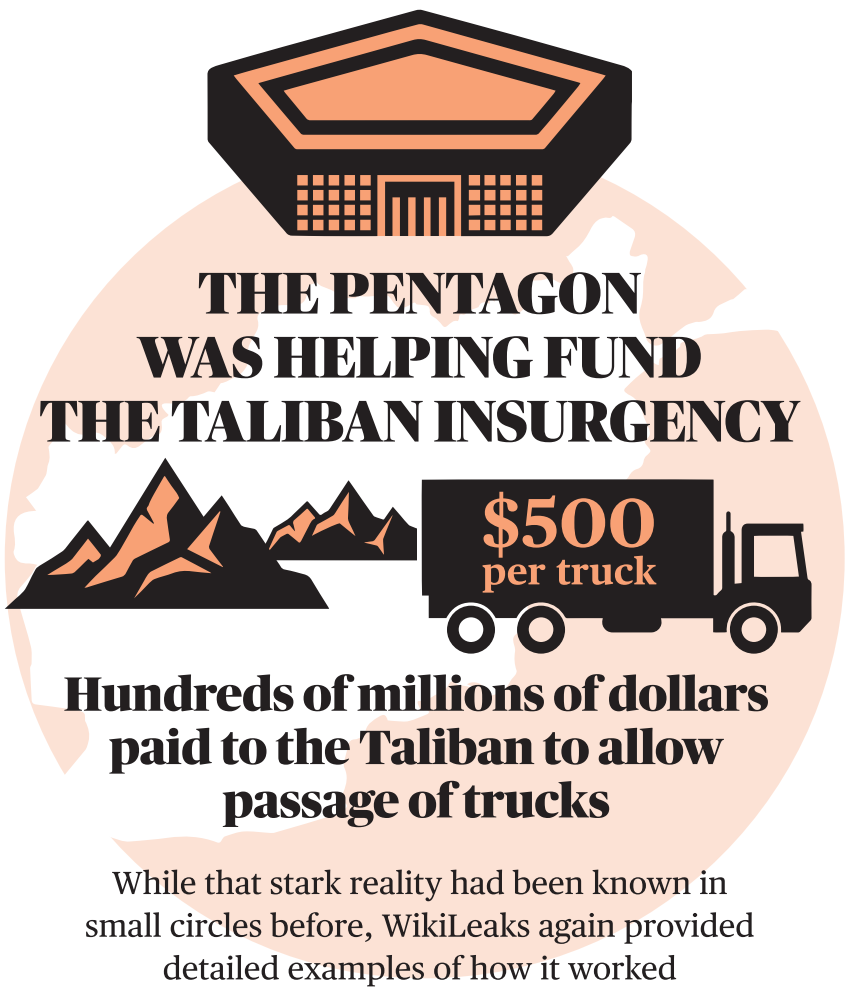
Dostum had long been known for his brutality, alleged mass rapes of young girls by his militia, the brutal killing of individual soldiers and others who crossed him, and more. Dostum's Junbish militia allegedly dropped cluster bombs on residential areas of Kabul in January 1997 as the civil war wound down. According to another February 2008 WikiLeaks cable sent from the US ambassador in Kabul to the CIA, DIA, State Department, and beyond, *"Dostum remains the quintessential warlord, an enduring symbol of Afghanistan's war-ravaged past whose bravado and violence earned for him the status of a respected, but deeply flawed national hero" [08KABUL491_a]*.

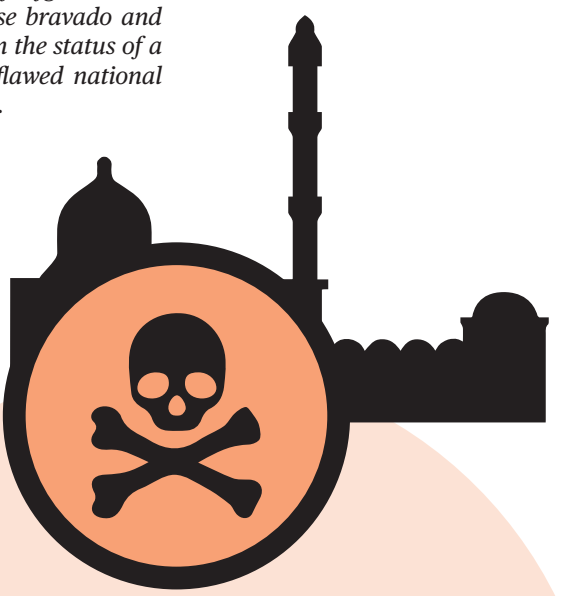
The WikiLeaks reports make clear the knowledge of US officials – military, intelligence, CIA, political, diplomatic, and beyond – about the Dasht-e-Leili massacre, and other examples of Dostum's culpability.

The documents cite a reminder to recipients that they should *"take every opportunity to remind observers that the Taliban were the primary abusers in the country and that any investigations into alleged Afghan military atrocities must be balanced with investigations into Taliban atrocities"*.

The Dasht-e-Leili massacre might have remained a horrific moment in the past, even with the details made available through WikiLeaks, were it not for the contemporary role of certain key players. In Afghanistan's presidential campaign in spring 2014, one of the leading candidates was Ashraf Ghani, a Western-oriented former World Bank official, who had in the past identified Dostum as a killer. But with ethnically based campaigning being central to Afghanistan's wartime election, Ghani suddenly welcomed General Dostum as his running mate, hoping to consolidate the Uzbek vote in Mazar-e Sharif and elsewhere in northern Afghanistan. After Ghani's hotly contested victory, the perpetrator of the Dasht-e-Leili massacre was sworn in as the new vice president of Afghanistan – with proud US and NATO backing for Afghanistan's new democracy. Afghanistan's war continues.■

Read this book and others at:





There is a legitimate role for secrecy, and there is a legitimate role for openness. Unfortunately, those who commit abuses against humanity or against the law find abusing legitimate secrecy to conceal their abuse all too easy.

People of good conscience have always revealed abuses by ignoring abusive strictures. It is not WikiLeaks that decides to reveal something. It is a whistleblower or a dissident who decides to reveal it. Our job is to make sure that these individuals are protected, the public is informed and the historical record is not denied.

JULIAN ASSANGE IN A 2010 INTERVIEW WITH *DER SPIEGEL*

US press freedom coalition calls for end to Assange prosecution, after shocking reporting on CIA misconduct

US Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001
October 15, 2021

Attorney General Merrick Garland:

We, the undersigned press freedom, civil liberties, and international human rights advocacy organizations, write again to share our profound concern about the ongoing criminal and extradition proceedings relating to Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, under the Espionage Act and the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act.[1]

In February, members of this coalition wrote to the Acting Attorney General, urging that the criminal charges against Mr. Assange be dropped.[2] We now renew that request with even greater urgency, in light of a recent story in Yahoo News describing alarming discussions within the CIA and Trump administration before the indictment against Assange was filed.[3] The Yahoo News story only heightens our concerns about the motivations behind this prosecution, and about the dangerous precedent that is being set.

As we noted in our earlier correspondence, the signatories to this letter have different perspectives on Mr. Assange and his organization. We are united, however, in our view that the criminal case against him poses a grave threat to press freedom both in the United States and abroad. We were disappointed that the Department of Justice appealed the decision by Judge Vanessa Baraitser of the Westminster Magistrates' Court to reject the Trump administration's extradition request. [4] Especially in light of the recent news report, we urge you to drop that appeal and dismiss the underlying indictment.

As we explained in our earlier letter, journalists routinely engage in much of the conduct described in the indictment: speaking with sources, asking for clarification or more documentation, and receiving and publishing official secrets. News organizations frequently and necessarily publish classified information in order to inform the public of matters of profound public significance. We appreciate that the government has a legitimate interest in protecting bona fide national security interests, but the proceedings against Mr. Assange jeopardize journalism that is crucial to democracy. In our view, a precedent created by prosecuting Assange could be used against publishers and journalists alike, chilling their work and undermining freedom of the press.

Major news organizations share this concern. The charges against Assange have been condemned by virtually every major American news outlet,[5] even though many of those news outlets have criticized Mr. Assange in the past.

In light of these concerns, and in light of the shocking new reporting on the government's conduct in this case, we respectfully urge you to drop the ongoing appeal of Judge Baraitser's ruling and to dismiss the indictment of Mr. Assange.

Respectfully,

(in alphabetical order)

Access Now
American Civil Liberties Union
Amnesty International USA
Center for Constitutional Rights
Committee to Protect Journalists
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress Education Fund
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Fight for the Future
First Amendment Coalition
Free Press
Freedom of the Press Foundation
Human Rights Watch
Index on Censorship
Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University
National Coalition Against Censorship
Open The Government
Partnership for Civil Justice Fund
PEN America
Project on Government Oversight
Reporters Without Borders
RootsAction.org
The Press Freedom Defense Fund of First Look Institute
Whistleblower and Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts

1 "WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange Charged in 18-Count Superseding Indictment."Department of Justice. May 3, 2019. and "WikiLeaks Founder Chargedin Superseding Indictment." Department of Justice. June 24, 2020.
2 Savage, Charlie. "Civil-Liberties Groups Ask Biden Justice Dept. to Drop Julian Assange Case." The New York Times. February 8, 2021.
3 Dorfman, Zach; Naylor, Sean D.; Isikoff, Michael. "Kidnapping, assassination and a London shoot-out: Inside the CIA's secret war plans against WikiLeaks." Yahoo News. September 26, 2021.
4 Order of District Judge (Magistrates' Court) Vanessa Baraitser In the WestminsterMagistrates' Court, January 4, 2021.
5 Fassett, Camille. "Press freedom advocates and news outlets strongly condemn new charges against Julian Assange." Freedom of the Press Foundation. May 24, 2019.

Write to Julian

Address

Mr Julian Assange
Prisoner #A9379AY
HMP Belmarsh
Western Way
London SE28 0EB
UK

Do

- Address your letter exactly as shown. You must include Julian's prisoner number: 'Prisoner #A9379AY' or date of birth 03/07/1971
- Include your full name and address on the back of the envelope or else the letter will not be delivered
- Do not hesitate to include an action you've taken to #ProtectJulian
- Include a blank piece of paper with a self-addressed envelope (your name and address written in pen not pencil) for Julian to write back. It must be pre-stamped (UK stamps only)*
- Send paper items only such as letters, photos & drawings
- You can share your reply from Julian with #WriteJulian (unless he has asked you not to or has marked the letter 'PRIVATE')

Do not

- Send any sensitive material
- Send greeting cards, postcards, packages, loose stamps or cash
- Send books or magazines
- Send excessive amounts of letters as they will be rejected
- Publish your reply from Julian if he has marked the letter 'PRIVATE' or otherwise asked you not to share it

Return postage

*IN THE UNITED STATES: You need TWO UK 1st class stamps affixed on the self-addressed stamped envelope for Julian to mail back to you.

NOT IN THE UNITED STATES: Find information about postage to places outside the US at royalmail.com/personal/uk-delivery/online-postage

For more information visit writejulian.com

Craig Murray's jailing is the latest move in a battle to snuff out independent journalism

Jonathan Cook
First published on 30 July 2021 at jonathon-cook.net
Abridged version published here

Craig Murray, a former ambassador to Uzbekistan, the father of a newborn child, a man in very poor health and one who has no prior convictions, will have to hand himself over to the Scottish police on Sunday morning. He becomes the first person ever to be imprisoned on the obscure and vaguely defined charge of "jigsaw identification".

Murray is also the first person to be jailed in Britain for contempt of court for their journalism in half a century - a period when such different legal and moral values prevailed that the British establishment had only just ended the prosecution of "homosexuals" and the jailing of women for having abortions.

Murray's imprisonment for eight months by Lady Dorrian, Scotland's second most senior judge, is of course based entirely on a keen reading of Scottish law rather than evidence of the Scottish and London political establishments seeking revenge on the former diplomat. And the UK supreme court's refusal on Thursday to hear Murray's appeal despite many glaring legal anomalies in the case, thereby paving his path to jail, is equally rooted in a strict application of the law, and not influenced in any way by political considerations.

Murray's jailing has nothing to do with the fact that he embarrassed the British state in the early 2000s by becoming that rarest of things: a whistleblowing diplomat. He exposed the British government's collusion, along with the US, in Uzbekistan's torture regime.

His jailing also has nothing to do with the fact that Murray has embarrassed the British state more recently by reporting the woeful and continuing legal abuses in a London courtroom as Washington seeks to extradite Wikileaks' founder, Julian Assange, and lock him away for life in a maximum security prison. The US wants to make an example of Assange for exposing its war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and for publishing leaked diplomatic cables that pulled the mask off Washington's ugly foreign policy.

Murray's jailing has nothing to do with the fact that the contempt proceedings against him allowed the Scottish court to deprive him of his passport so that he could not travel to Spain and testify in a related Assange case that is severely embarrassing Britain and the US. The Spanish hearing has been presented with reams of evidence that the US illegally spied on Assange inside the Ecuadorean embassy in London, where he sought political asylum to avoid extradition. Murray was due to testify that his own confidential conversations with Assange were filmed, as were Assange's privileged meetings with his own lawyers. Such spying should have seen the case against Assange thrown out, had the judge in London actually been applying the law.

Similarly, Murray's jailing has nothing to do with his embarrassing the Scottish political and legal establishments by reporting, almost single-handedly, the defence case in the trial of Scotland's former First Minister, Alex Salmond. Unreported by the corporate media, the evidence submitted by Salmond's lawyers led a jury dominated by women to acquit him of a raft of sexual assault charges.

It is Murray's reporting of Salmond's defence that has been the source of his current troubles.

And most assuredly, Murray's jailing has precisely nothing to do with his argument - one that might explain why the jury was so unconvinced by the prosecution case - that Salmond was actually the victim of a high-level plot by senior politicians at Holyrood to discredit him and prevent his return to the forefront of Scottish politics. The intention, says Murray, was to deny Salmond the chance to take on London and make a serious case for independence, and thereby expose the SNP's increasing lip service to that cause.

Murray has been one of the few journalists to report in detail the arguments made by Assange's legal team in his extradition hearings. Noticeably in both the Assange and Murray cases, the presiding judge has limited the free speech protections traditionally afforded to journalism and has done so by restricting who qualifies as a journalist. Both cases have been frontal assaults on the ability of certain kinds of journalists - those who are free from corporate or state pressure - to cover important political stories, effectively criminalising independent journalism. And all this has been achieved by sleight of hand.

In Assange's case, Judge Vanessa Baraitser largely assented to US claims that what the Wikileaks founder had done was espionage rather than journalism. The Obama administration had held off prosecuting Assange because it could not find a distinction in law between his legal right to publish evidence of US war crimes and the New York Times and the Guardian's right to publish the same evidence, provided to them by Wikileaks. If the US administration prosecuted Assange, it would also need to prosecute the editors of those papers.

First, all independent, unlicensed journalism was lumped in as "fake news". With that as the background, social media corporations were able to collude with so-called legacy media corporations to algorithm independent journalists into oblivion. And now independent journalists are being educated about what fate is likely to befall them should they try to emulate Assange or Murray.

Asleep at the wheel

In fact, while corporate journalists have been asleep at the wheel, the British establishment has been preparing to widen the net to criminalise all journalism that seeks to seriously hold power to account. A recent government consultation document calling for a more draconian crackdown on what is being deceptively termed "onward disclosure" - code for journalism - has won the backing of Home Secretary Priti Patel. The document implicitly categorises journalism as little different from espionage and whistleblowing.

In the wake of the consultation paper, the Home Office has called on parliament to consider "increased maximum sentences" for offenders - that is, journalists - and ending the distinction "between espionage and the most serious unauthorised disclosures". The government's argument is that "onward disclosures" can create "far more serious damage" than espionage and so should be treated similarly. If accepted, any public interest defence - the traditional safeguard for journalists - will be muted.

Anyone who followed the Assange hearings last summer - which excludes most journalists in the corporate media - will notice strong echoes of the arguments made by the US for extraditing Assange, arguments conflating journalism with espionage that were largely accepted by Judge Baraitser.

None of this has come out of the blue. As the online technology publication The Register noted back in 2017, the Law Commission was at the time considering "proposals in the UK for a swingeing new Espionage Act that could jail journalists as spies". It said such an act was being "developed in haste by legal advisers".

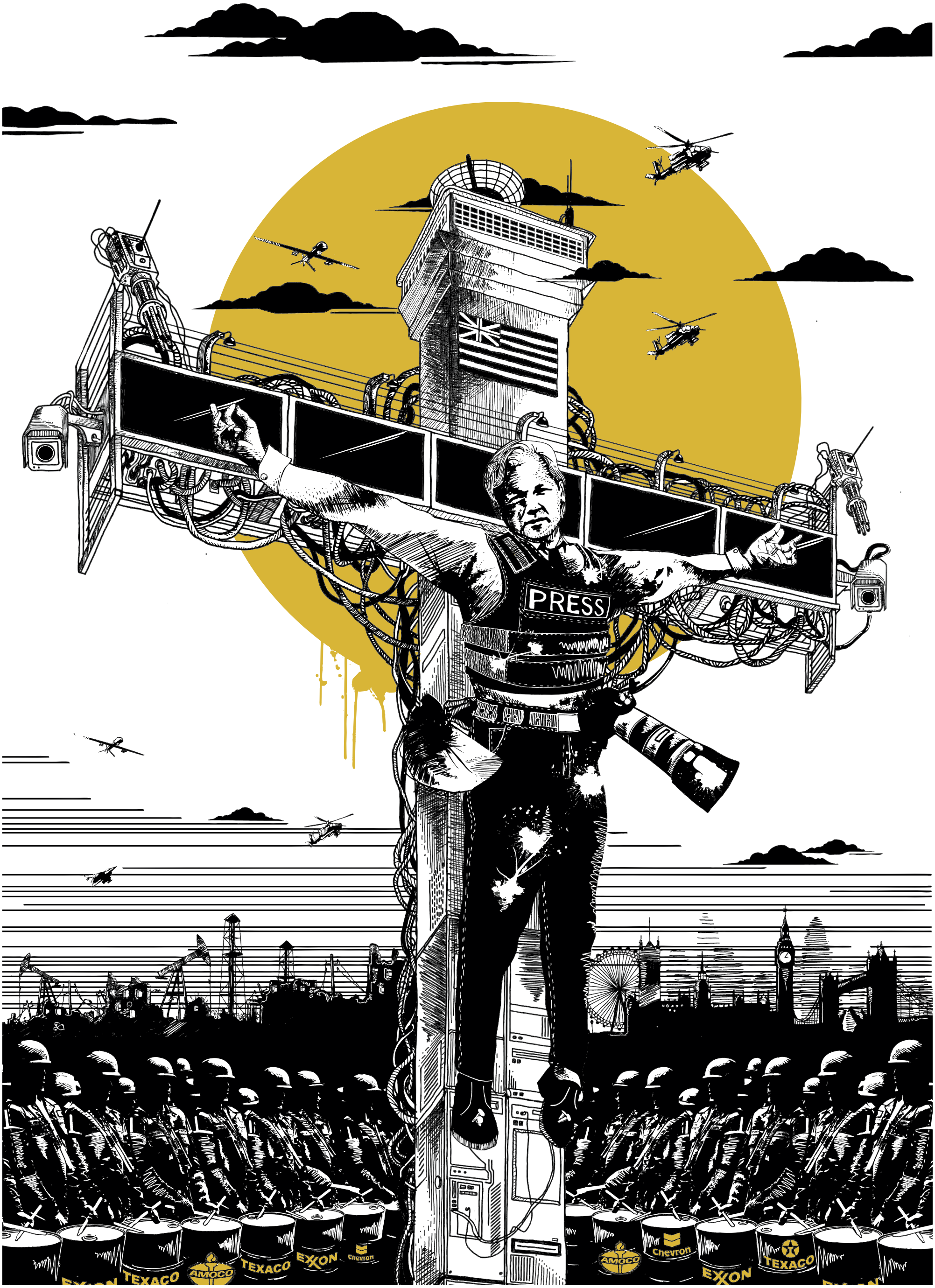
It is quite extraordinary that two investigative journalists - one a long-term, former member of staff at the Guardian - managed to write an entire article in that paper this month on the government consultation paper and not mention Assange once. The warning signs have been there for the best part of a decade but corporate journalists have refused to notice them. Similarly, it is no coincidence that Murray's plight has also not registered on the corporate media's radar.

Assange and Murray are the canaries in the coal mine for the growing crackdown on investigative journalism and on efforts to hold executive power to account. There is, of course, ever less of that being done by the corporate media, which may explain why corporate outlets appear not only relaxed about the mounting political and legal climate against free speech and transparency but have been all but cheering it on.

In the Assange and Murray cases, the British state is carving out for itself a space to define what counts as legitimate, authorised journalism - and journalists are colluding in this dangerous development, if only through their silence. That collusion tells us a great deal about the mutual interests of the corporate political and legal establishments, on the one hand, and the corporate media establishment on the other.

Assange and Murray are not only telling us troubling truths we are not supposed to hear. The fact that they are being denied solidarity by those who are their colleagues, those who may be next in the firing line, tells us everything we need to know about the so-called mainstream media: that the role of corporate journalists is to serve establishment interests, not challenge them.■

Read the full article:



FREE ASSANGE!

Collateral Crucifixion by Captain Borderline and Shanti Signal, 20-metre-high mural in Berlin

Amnesty International expert on national security:

"Assange should be released"

Julia Hall
Amnesty International expert on national security

Il Fatto Quotidiano *sat down for an in-depth interview with the internationally respected lawyer Julia Hall to discuss the Assange case and the Pegasus scandal*

First published on 24 July 2021

A prominent expert on national security and human rights at Amnesty International, Julia Hall has spent the last two decades working on extraordinary renditions, CIA black sites and Guantanamo and researching the impact of diplomatic assurances on detainees at risk of extradition to countries where they might suffer ill-treatment or torture.

This month, the Biden Administration offered diplomatic assurances to the British authorities that if they allow the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States, the Administration will not imprison him in the most extreme American prison, ADX Florence, and will not subject him to the harsh regime known as "Special Administrative Measures" (SAMs). Il Fatto Quotidiano asked Julia Hall for an analysis of these assurances and for comment on the Pegasus scandal, which Amnesty International has greatly contributed to exposing.

The investigation on Julian Assange and WikiLeaks was opened by the Obama Administration, but it was Trump who charged him and we now have president Biden. Amnesty International is asking for the charges against Assange to be dropped. Do you believe it is likely that the Biden Administration will drop them?

We had some hope early on, when the Biden Administration first took office in January, and we really thought that potentially there could be a review of the case. Biden was the vice president in the Obama Administration, and the Obama Administration clearly chose not to pursue Assange, and so there was some hope at the beginning. Then we saw the appeal. It was really quite disappointing, because we did think that possibly there was an opening there, and for reasons that the Administration has not articulated well so far, they have made the decision to pursue. At this point, I think the appeal will go through in the United Kingdom, and the disturbing thing about it, in addition to the fact that they are appealing at all, is how long things will take, how this really continues to harm Assange because of his conditions in detention in the UK, especially now with Covid. This is part of the strategy to keep him detained as long as possible, it's a kind of death by a thousand cuts.

Can you explain to us why Amnesty International thinks that diplomatic assurances will not work, and therefore opposes the extradition of Julian Assange to the US despite those assurances?

The US made it very easy for us to oppose the extradition, because they gave with one hand and took away with the other. They say: we guarantee that he won't be held in a maximum security facility and he will not be subjected to Special Administrative Measures and he will get healthcare. But if he does something that we don't like, we reserve the right to not guarantee him, we reserve the right to put him in a maximum security facility, we reserve the right to offer him Special Administrative Measures. Those are not assurances at all. It's not that difficult to look at those assurances and say: these are inherently unreliable, it promises to do something and then reserves the right to break the promise. The judge [Vanessa Baraitser, who denied extradition last January] said: under section 91 of the Extradition Treaty, it would be oppressive to send Julian Assange to a situation in the United States where he may be subjected to conditions of detention that could lead him to self-harm or suicide. So when you look at the assurances and you see that the US government reserves the right to put him in a maximum security facility or to subject him to Special Administrative Measures, based on his conduct, you are not in a state where the prohibition of torture is absolute. The prolonged solitary confinement that exists in maximum security facilities, or if he is subjected to SAMs, are a violation of the ban on torture. The ban on torture cannot be conditioned on anything he does; it's an absolute ban. No matter what you do, under international laws, you cannot be tortured. It's really important to remember that the standard in Europe is: is a person at risk of torture or ill treatment? You don't have to say that he will absolutely be tortured or ill-treated, you have to say: is it a situation where this person would be at risk of torture? The US has built that risk into these assurances.

I have been studying this in the context of the US rendition programme for almost two decades. The US has made it easy for other governments to use assurances, but what this really does is undermine the international prohibition on torture. The UK government should not be involved in any further undermining of the global ban on torture, it should be promoting the global ban on torture. It's a much bigger issue that goes way beyond Assange. The Assange case would affect so many people, should he be sent to the United States and prosecuted.

Continued on page 20

From the WikiLeaks archives

The Intolerance Network

5 August 2021: **WikiLeaks publishes "The Intolerance Network" over 17,000 documents from internationally active right wing campaigning organisations HazteOir and CitizenGO. The documents date from 2001 to 2017 and cover the founding of CitizenGO and early activities of both organisations. The documents are from their internal systems and cover things like: spreadsheets of donors and members, strategy and planning documents, letters, financial charts and legal and training documents.**

HazteOir was first founded in 2001 in Spain to campaign for right wing values, in 2013 it founded CitizenGO to spread its work beyond Spanish speaking countries. This dataset includes the founding of CitizenGo, and documents from HazteOir organising, along with US based The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, the 2012 World Congress for Families (WCF) in Madrid. The WCF brings together right wing organisations that promote opposition to LGBTQI+ and reproductive rights, it has been labeled as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. A 2014 Human Rights Campaign report stated "The World Congress of Families (WCF) is one of the most influential American organisations involved in the export of hate".

WikiLeaks Editor Kristinn Hrafnsson said: "As ultra right wing political groups have gained strength in latter years with increasing attacks on woman's and LGBTQI+ rights, it is valuable to have access to documents from those who have lobbied for these changes on a global basis. The people have a right to know where political policies are hatched".

wikileaks.org/intolerancenetwork

Amnesty International expert on national security:

"Assange should be released"

Continued from page 19

Journalists and experts who have followed the case for the last decade believe that what the US and the UK authorities want is for him to either commit suicide or leave the UK prison brain dead. Do you agree with this?

I am not a forensic or medical expert on torture, what I can tell you is that international standards will be violated if he is transferred to the US, and we do have very serious concerns about the proceedings. They have been carried out for over two years with Assange in Belmarsh, during Covid, in conditions that have exacerbated his mental health conditions. It's clear to us that he should be released on bail, pending the conclusion of the proceedings in the UK. In the absence of the administration dropping the extradition, the court process has to continue, but in the middle of that, he should be released. You cannot have a court judgement saying: this person is at risk, because his mental health condition is so fragile, and then keep him in Belmarsh, which just continues to help degrade his mental health condition. There is action on the US part to drop the charges, but there are immediate actions that the UK can take right now, to alleviate and to mitigate the conditions that actually continue to contribute to his mental health status, which is quite fragile.

Before his arrest, Julian Assange and his visitors were spied on inside the Ecuadorian Embassy. This week, Amnesty International greatly contributed to revealing how thousands of journalists, human rights activists and political leaders were potentially targeted by a cyberweapon called Pegasus, marketed by an Israeli company, NSO Group. Do you think it's time for a global moratorium?

Yes, we've called for a moratorium until a strong, effective, meaningful human rights regulatory framework is in place. Stop now, and let's come together and create a framework where people like human rights defenders, journalists, opposition politicians, lawyers, they will not be targeted by that software and - or, if they are, they have recourse. Our call is strong and direct, it's not ambiguous.

It's time to make people who defend the use of such tools for anti-terrorism purposes understand that these are weapons: the so-called cyberweapons.

I actually think they already know. Governments are buying from this company, they can buy under the guise of only pursuing criminals and alleged terrorists, but it is key to the notion of the state monopoly on power that the state is going to use any new tool that it gets to maintain that power for purposes beyond those for which it was intended. It's very clear what happens with this spyware. This is a wakeup call, really, to the rest of the world, that simply trusting that the government is going to purchase spyware only to catch the so-called bad guys is not true. It has been exposed through the work we have done as technical partners on this report, and our partners in Paris, Forbidden Stories, have done. This is such an important story and hopefully the public will be educated to roll back surveillance of this type.

Twenty years after 9/11, we see that in our Western democracies the war criminals and the torturers are free, whereas a journalist, Julian Assange, is in prison precisely for revealing those crimes. Isn't it time for public opinion to wake up before it is too late for our democracies?

That is precisely what we are trying to do with this report [on Pegasus], with the work on Assange. Who is really the perpetrator of the human rights violations, who is violating the humanitarian laws, who is committing war crimes? It is not Julian Assange, it is not dedicated journalists and publishers who put information in the public interest into the public domain. The perpetrators of these crimes are state actors or agents of the state, and that is why Assange is a threat and other publishers who do the same are a threat, because they push way beyond their weight in terms of holding the states accountable, and states don't like it. Assange is such an important test case, because he is representative of all that, of state power, and if the US extradites him, if the US gets that long arm to reach out and grab a foreign publisher and bring him into the United States, and says he doesn't have First Amendment rights to do what he does, that precedent can be damaging so far beyond this case, and that is why we are trying to forestall.■

Assange is a hero. In my view, he exposed the 'wrong' policies, the disgusting policies of the US government and NATO. Now he's living in the hearts of all the justice-loving people.

He should not be put in jail. Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, all these warmongers, should be in jail, not Julian Assange, not Chelsea Manning. They are brave and raise their voices for justice and peace.

MALALAI JOYA,
PEACE ACTIVIST IN
AFGHANISTAN

In the aftermath of the Vault 7 leak, viewed at the time as the largest data loss in the CIA's history, Pompeo was enraged and demanded a multi-pronged campaign to dismantle WikiLeaks.

Publicly, he described the group as a "non-state hostile intelligence service". But privately, he pushed for aggressive action at meetings with top Trump administration officials, including a snatch operation to abduct Assange from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

YAHOO NEWS

Hacking Justice (2021)

Documentary - 1h 29min

by Clara López and Juan Pancorbo

Containing the latest developments from the US extradition ruling, the film depicts Baltasar Garzón, a former Spanish judge who jailed Pinochet.

With unique access to the characters, the film witnesses the struggle for the control of information, the growing influence of intelligence services and the difficult balance of individual rights and state security.

Scan to watch:

Published by WeeklyLeaks, K Dwyer, Western Way, Plumstead SE28 0EB, London, United Kingdom