

## **Julian Assange show trial resumes in Britain: Why the U.S. government wants him silenced**

[By Ron Ridenour, published in \*Covert Action Magazine\*, Sept 7, 2020](#)

Julian Assange has been held in isolation (23 hours per day) at Belmarsh high-security prison since he was dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London, April 11, 2019. The United States government claims he violated its Espionage Act of 1917 and committed illegal computer hacking. U.S. authorities requested England's government arrest and extradite him. He would be tried in Alexandria, Virginia. It is there that a secret grand jury began gathering a case against him on May 11, 2011. The extradition trial which started on September 7 at Old Bailey, the central criminal court of London, is expected to last three or four weeks.

Following his arrest, the court's first legal proceedings against Assange dealt with his breach of bail conditions; he had sought asylum in Ecuador's embassy to avoid imprisonment in the U.S. Assange had only 15 minutes to prepare with his lawyer and the hearing lasted only 15 minutes. As has been widely reported, [one judge said](#) that Assange was a "narcissist who cannot get beyond his own self-interest."

The judges, including Chief Magistrate Emma Arbuthnot, ruled that he should be held in "custody" for 50 weeks. Bail violations are usually punished by a fine, and/or a few days in jail. Assange's "custody" for such a minor offense resulted in isolation. He has long since served that time, but the government won't release him pending results on the extradition matter. The U.S. government's original charges against Assange would have netted a maximum of five years imprisonment.

In June, 2019, Magistrate Arbuthnot ruled that a full extradition hearing should begin February 25, 2020, then expected to last five days. The trial was postponed while the U.S. initiated more charges against him, which now amount to 18 counts with a possible sentence of 175 years imprisonment.

When there are court hearings, Assange is usually too sick to attend, and participates via video. He is allowed few visitors and even his lawyer is often not allowed in, or is limited to a few minutes. Julian is not even allowed to have materials pertaining to the case in his cell.

### **Assange's alleged crimes**

As readers of *Covert Action Magazine* [are well aware](#), Assange is the founder of Wikileaks, a non-profit organization that claims to have published over ten million classified documents in the first ten years of its operations starting in 2006. The most explosive revelations include war logs from the Afghan War and the infamous '[Collateral Murder](#)' video from July 2007 in which U.S. troops opened fire and killed over a dozen people in a Baghdad suburb including two journalists. Two children involved in the rescue were also seriously wounded. [\[1\]](#)

While many people herald the Wikileaks' exposure of government atrocities and corruption, others have criticized Assange and Wikileaks for inadequately curating its content and violating personal privacy. Notwithstanding, Brigadier General Robert Carr, the counter-intelligence officer who had overseen the investigation by the U.S. Defense Department, admitted under oath in 2013 that "I don't have a specific example" of any person who came to harm due to the publication of the leaks. The claim that Assange collaborated with Russians to leak emails that depicted Hillary Clinton in a negative light in the 2016 election has also not been substantiated.[\[2\]](#)

The U.S. government has pursued a vendetta against Assange and Wikileaks because they have been repeatedly humiliated by them.

Whistleblowers have historically been treated very harshly not primarily because of the content of the information that they have helped leak, but because they challenge the legitimacy and authority of the state.[\[3\]](#) The Assange trial should be viewed in this context.

### **No fair trial is possible**

Counsels for the U.S. government contend that Assange has committed the largest "crimes" of compromises of information in U.S. history. It was irrelevant to the U.S. government and England's magistrates that the "compromises of information" exposed truths of many types of governmental crimes, including war crimes punishable by years to life imprisonment.

If Assange is sent to Alexandria, he has no chance of a fair trial. According to [Alexandria's demographics](#), the city of 159,000 people is located 12 kilometers from downtown Washington D.C. Of 96,500 employed persons, 24,000 work directly for the government, mainly for intelligence services (CIA, NSA) and defense departments, and many private company employees are government contractors.

Grand juror selection in Alexandria always includes government employees or private workers associated with the government. That is why the government always prosecutes accused violators of national security and espionage laws there. No journalist has ever been so tried. The Espionage Act was made in wartime to prohibit U.S. residents/citizens from supporting U.S. enemies in times of war. Julian Assange does not fit those criteria.

According to Nils Meltzer, the United Nations' special rapporteur on torture, even more Alexandria residents—more than the demographics agency stated—work for the U.S. government. He told interviewer Daniel Ryser: "The choice of location is not by coincidence, because the jury members must be chosen in proportion to the local population, and 85 per cent of Alexandria residents work in the national security community—at the CIA, the NSA, the Defense Department and the State Department. When people are tried for harming national security in front of a jury like that, the verdict is clear from the very beginning. The cases are always tried in front of the same judge behind closed doors and on the strength of classified evidence. No one has ever been acquitted there on a similar case."[\[4\]](#)

The most contentious exposés for the U.S. and Britain are connected to the downloading of a "vast amount of classified documents" by Chelsea Manning when she was a U.S. army intelligence analyst. She subsequently served seven years in prison. These files included

approximately 90,000 reports about the war in Afghanistan, 400,000 Iraq war reports and 800,000 Guantánamo Bay detainee assessments, as well as 250,000 U.S. diplomatic cables. Many daily newspapers published information and documentation provided by Assange-led Wikileaks. Many of these newspapers which published Wikileaks exposures, such as *The Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *BBC* television and radio have since abandoned Assange and his historic case against freedom of the press.

A 2019 study by John O'Day in *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* found that even muckraking journals like *Mother Jones* have made a point of dismissing Assange's claims to be a journalist, and denounced him for helping leakers to break the law.<sup>[5]</sup>

In Denmark, the daily *Politiken* also published some of Wikileaks documents. Yet both it and state-sponsored *DR Media* headlined news articles of the upcoming extradition trial as an outgrowth of earlier rape charges against him, which Swedish authorities dropped in November 2019.<sup>[6]</sup> When this reporter confronted the media with this error, they did nothing to correct the falsehood. This is a typical example of how the Western mass media in most countries demean and dismiss the Assange-Wikileaks publications as a legitimate medium.

### **Sweden joins the witchhunt**

Two Swedish women, Anna Ardin and Sophia Wilén, had consensual sex with Assange when he visited them and held talks in Stockholm, in August 2010. Ardin invited Assange to her home and bedroom. After hosting a party for him at her flat, she tweeted friends that she was with Assange, one of the “world's coolest, smartest people; it's amazing”. After several days of sexual relations, Ardin and Wilén went to police to ask that Assange be tested for venereal disease. They said he had not always worn a condom and that one had torn. There was no question of use of force. Assange did go to the police station on his own. He was cleared of any illegality by prosecutor Eva Finne, who said, “There is no suspicion of any crime whatsoever.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Only after the government changed prosecutors, following encouragement from the CIA, did the new one issue a warrant for simply 'questioning' him. By then, Assange was in England. He agreed to return to Sweden if the government would guarantee that it would not extradite him to the U.S., as he realized the Obama government wanted his scalp. Even though such requests are frequently granted, Sweden refused to do so for this publisher-activist.

In the summer of 2012, an English court ordered Assange's extradition to Sweden for “questioning”. Assange, his staff, and lawyers were fearful that Sweden would send him further to the U.S. Assange then sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy, at a time when Rafael Correa was president. Correa granted him asylum and later granted him citizenship.

It took Sweden five years before they finally interviewed him after his lawyers had suggested dozens of times they come to the Ecuadorian embassy where he awaited them. Finally, Sweden wanted to drop the case, but Britain kept urging them not to.

In Daniel Ryser's interview with Nils Meltzer, he asked, “Why were the British so eager to prevent the Swedes from closing the case?” Meltzer replied, “We have to stop believing that

there was really an interest in leading an investigation into a sexual offense. What Wikileaks did is a threat to the political elite in the U.S., Britain, France and Russia in equal measure. Wikileaks publishes secret state information—they are opposed to classification. And in a world—even in so-called mature democracies, where secrecy has become rampant--that is seen as a fundamental threat.”

Sweden finally dropped the case in November 2019. By that time, Russiagate was in full swing. So that replaced the Sweden 'rape' card. The Democratic Party National Committee, with Hillary Clinton in the lead, claimed Russia hacked into its server and had Wikileaks publish emails, revealing corruption by Hillary Clinton and sabotaging the primaries. Democratic leaders and the CIA saw a good chance to blame Putin and Assange, their two main enemies, for what was a probable disenchanted insider's leak.[\[8\]](#)

Authorities didn't even do forensics on the DNC equipment. No proof was found, not even by the anti-Trump, anti-Putin Robert Mueller inquiry. Probably in an effort to compromise, Trump and cohorts decided to blame Julian Assange alone for exposing state secrets, i.e. “espionage”. By that time, Wikileaks had disclosed millions of documents exposing crimes and corruption of scores of governments.

The new Ecuadorian president, Lenin Moreno (May 2017), withdrew Assange's asylum and revoked his Ecuadorian passport overnight, without consulting or even informing Assange. Moreno did so after assurances that the U.S. would guarantee loans, increase trade and investments to his country. USAID funding for U.S. propaganda programs returned to Ecuador after its new president betrayed his fellow citizen Assange.

After a decade of internment, either in jail, under house arrest or seven years in a small area of the Ecuadorian embassy in London, the efforts to undermine Assange intensified. The CIA even had a Spanish company, Undercover Global, spy on him while in the Ecuadorian embassy. The Spanish National Court has opened an investigation into this.[\[9\]](#)

“Undercover Global is suspected of having installed microphones in a fire extinguisher at the embassy as well as in the women's toilets where Assange used to meet with his lawyers for fear of being spied on... 'Meetings which Assange held with his lawyers, as well as medical visits and those of other nature were recorded,' the court said.”

The information, including video film, was then transferred to computer servers that were accessible to both the Ecuadorian and U.S. intelligence services, the court added.

### **Judicial conflict of interest**

Judge Emma Arbuthnot's husband, Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom,[\[10\]](#) “a former defense minister, is a [paid chair](#) of the advisory board of military corporation Thales Group,” and was an [adviser](#) to arms company Babcock International. Both companies have major contracts with the UK Ministry of Defence.

British judges are required to declare any potential conflicts of interests to the courts, but Judge Arbuthnot did not excuse herself from judging the Wikileaks publisher. Lady Arbuthnot began presiding over Assange's legal case in 2017. She remains the supervising legal figure in the

process. According to the UK courts service, the [chief magistrate](#) is “responsible for...supporting and guiding district judge colleagues.”

“At a time when Lady Arbuthnot was in her former position as a district judge in Westminster, she personally benefitted from funding together with her husband from two sources which were exposed by WikiLeaks in its document releases,” wrote Mark Curtis and Matt Kennard. [\[11\]](#)

There is more than a mere “appearance of bias”. The judge’s husband was part of a delegation, including a former chair of the British joint intelligence committee which co-ordinates GCHQ, MI5 and MI6, which met with Turkey’s foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and energy minister Berat Albayrak, PM Erdoğan’s son-in-law. In 2016, WikiLeaks published 57,934 of Albayrak’s personal emails, of which more than 300 mentioned Çavuşoğlu, in its “[Berat’s Box](#)” release.

“Thus at the same time Lady Arbuthnot was presiding over Assange’s legal case, her husband was holding talks with senior officials in Turkey exposed by WikiLeaks, some of whom have an interest in punishing Assange and the WikiLeaks organization,” wrote Curtis-Kennard.

### **Britain tortures the messenger**

Assange is still isolated in Belmarsh prison despite [torturous conditions](#) described by UN special rapporteur Nils Meltzer. He and two doctor specialists in torture, examined Assange in prison and concluded that he is a victim of “psychological torture”. Meltzer went so far as to compare what was being done to Assange with what the Nazis did. They realized that using psychological torture is more effective in breaking victims than physical torture.

The Convention on Torture—to which the U.S., UK, Sweden and Ecuador are parties (while persecuting and/or prosecuting Assange)—requires that member countries allow investigations by the UN rapporteur into such charges. They all refused to do so.

Several politicians have publicly stated that Assange should be “hunted down” (Sarah Palin), or “assassinated” (Tom Flanagan). Flanagan was a senior adviser to the Canadian PM Stephen Harper when issuing what was called a “[fatwa](#)” against Assange on the Canadian state television network *CBC*. “I think Assange should be assassinated...I think Obama should put out a contract and maybe use a drone or something.” [\[12\]](#) Hillary Clinton said the same to her staff on November 23, 2010: “Can’t we just drone him?” [\[13\]](#)

### **Cablegate**

Wikileaks disclosure of U.S. diplomatic cables between 1966 and 2010 are an extreme embarrassment to the U.S. government. Among the disclosures were various Hillary Clinton orders to U.S. diplomats, U.S. ambassadors’ complaints about U.S. allies, and other embarrassing commentary and revelations:

- British troops in Afghanistan are not very good at the job. This angered British politicians who always stand beside U.S. warmongers.
- The U.S. is working with Sweden’s military and secret services inside NATO, although Sweden is not a member and the majority of the Swedish people are opposed to NATO

membership. Cables revealed this 'realpolitik' in which Sweden's parliament was in the dark.

- Secretary of State Clinton ordered diplomats to steal personal material information including DNA, fingerprints, iris scans, credit card information. She also requested tapping phones from UN officials, even its general secretary, as well as human rights group leaders.
- Britain's Iraq inquiry was fixed to "protect U.S. interests".
- Cables further show that the U.S. supported the massacre of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians over decades by Sri Lanka's Sinhalese-dominated governments, even before a civil war broke out (1983-2009). During the last days of the civil war, April-May 2009, when Tamil fighting forces surrendered, thousands of civilians were massacred and surrendering fighters were executed.

So yes, a truly free press can be dangerous to criminal politicians. That is why a free press must be turned into a servile adjunct.

Jonathan Cook explains how the media has failed in its mission to inform the public honestly: "Eight years of misdirection by the corporate media has laid the ground for the current public indifference to Assange's extradition and widespread ignorance of its horrendous implications...Journalists do not need to care about Assange or like him. They have to speak out in protest because approval of his extradition will mark the official death of journalism. It will mean that any journalist in the world who unearths embarrassing truths about the U.S., who discovers its darkest secrets, will need to keep quiet or risk being jailed for the rest of their lives. That ought to terrify every journalist."

He went on to say: "Assange did not just expose the political class, he exposed the media class too—for their feebleness, for their hypocrisy, for their dependence on the centers of power, for their inability to criticize a corporate system in which they were embedded."<sup>[14]</sup>

Meltzer concluded an [in-depth interview with Republik](#) thusly: "In order for the division of powers to work, the state must be monitored by the press as the fourth estate. WikiLeaks is the logical consequence of an ongoing process of expanded secrecy: If the truth can no longer be examined because everything is kept secret, if investigation reports on the U.S. government's torture policy are kept secret and when even large sections of the published summary are redacted, leaks are at some point inevitably the result."

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*Covert Action Magazine* was created in 2018. It is the continuation of *Covert Action* journal, founded in 1978 by former CIA officer turned agency critic Philip Agee along with William Schaap, James and Elsie Wilcott, Ellen Ray, William Kunstler, Michael Ratner, and Lou Wolf in 1978. ([Wikipedia](#))

**Notes:**

[1] Wikileaks, in [Wikipedia](#). <https://collateralmurder.wikileaks.org/>.

[2] 'Intel Vets Challenge 'Russia Hack' Evidence', in *Consortium News*, July 24, 2017 <https://consortiumnews.com/2017/07/24/intel-vets-challenge-russia-hack-evidence/>

[3] See Lloyd C. Gardner, *War on Leakers: National Security and American Democracy*, from Eugene V. Debs to Edward Snowden (New York: The New Press, 2016). Chase Madar in *The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story Behind the Wikileaks Whistleblower* (New York: OR Books, 2012) describes how Manning was subject to a harsh regiment of punitive solitary confinement designed "as a warning to other prospective whistle-blowers, and used as a way to break him, crush his spirit and force him to implicate Julian Assange [Wikileaks founder] and Wikileaks in espionage charges."

[4] <https://www.republik.ch/2020/01/31/nils-melzer-about-wikileaks-founder-julian-assange>

[5] John O'Day, 'Corporate Media Have Second Thoughts About Exiling Julian Assange From Journalism', in *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* (FAIR), June 5, 2019

<https://fair.org/home/corporate-media-have-second-thoughts-about-exiling-julian-assange-from-journalism/>

[6] Ben Quinn, 'Sweden Drops Julian Assange Rape Investigation', *The Guardian*, November 19, 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/nov/19/sweden-drops-julian-assange-investigation>

[7] <https://consortiumnews.com/2020/09/04/assange-extradition-after-cheering-assanges-abuse-journalists-have-paved-path-to-us-gulag/>

[8] See <https://consortiumnews.com/2017/07/24/intel-vets-challenge-russia-hack-evidence/> and <https://medium.com/@caityjohnstone/the-index-of-russiagate-debunkery-f5b6f4101dd0>. Former NSA Technical Director Bill Binney has promoted the theory that the alleged hack of the computers may have been orchestrated by the CIA in an attempt to set up Russia.

[9] <https://news.yahoo.com/spanish-court-probes-alleged-spying-assange-ecuadorian-embassy-180112903.html>

[10] <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/52548.htm>

[11] *ibid.*

[12] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/01/us-embassy-cables-executed-mike-huckabee>

[13] <https://wearechange.org/hillary-clinton-proposed-drone-strike-julian-assange/>

[14] <https://consortiumnews.com/2020/09/04/assange-extradition-after-cheering-assanges-abuse-journalists-have-paved-path-to-us-gulag/>