

The Assange Arrest: You Have the Right to Remain Silent

The arrest of Julian Assange was an act of revenge by the US government that strikes at the heart of journalism, writes Pepe Escobar.

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The date - April 11, 2019 - will live in infamy in the annals of Western "values" and "freedom of expression." The image is stark. A handcuffed journalist and publisher dragged out by force from the inside of an embassy, clutching a [Gore Vidal book](#) on the History of the U.S. National Security State.

The mechanism is brutal. WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange was arrested because the United States demanded this from the Tory British government, which for its part meekly claimed it did not pressure Ecuador to revoke Assange's asylum.

The U.S. magically erases Ecuador's financial troubles, ordering the IMF to release a providential [\\$4.2-billion loan](#). Immediately after, Ecuadorian diplomats "invite" the London Metropolitan Police to come inside their embassy to arrest their long-term guest.

Let's cut to the chase. Julian Assange is not a U.S. citizen, he's an Australian. WikiLeaks is not a U.S.-based media organization. If the US government gets Assange extradited, prosecuted and incarcerated, it will legitimize its right to go after anyone, anyhow, anywhere, anytime.

Call it The Killing of Journalism.

Get Me That Password?

The [case](#) by the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) against Assange is flimsy at best. Everything has to do essentially with the release of classified info in 2010 - 90,000 military files on Afghanistan, 400,000 files on Iraq and 250,000 diplomatic cables spanning most of the planet.

Assange is allegedly guilty of helping Chelsea Manning, the former U.S. Army intel analyst, to get these documents. But it gets trickier. He's also allegedly guilty of "encouraging" Manning to collect more information.

There's no other way to interpret that. This amounts, no holds barred, to all-out criminalization of journalistic practice.

For the moment, Assange is charged with "conspiracy to commit computer intrusion." The indictment argues that Assange helped Manning to [crack a password](#) stored on Pentagon

computers linked to the Secret Internet Protocol Network (SIPRNet). [Though a closer [look](#) at the indictment shows the alleged help was to obscure Manning's identity and not intrude into a DOD computer.]

In March 2010 chat logs obtained by the U.S. government, Manning talks to someone alternatively named "Ox" and "press association." The DoJ is convinced this interlocutor is Assange. But they must conclusively prove it.

Manning and this person, allegedly Assange, engaged in "discussions." "During an exchange, Manning told Assange that 'after this upload, that's all I really have got left.' To which Assange replied: 'Curious eyes never run dry in my experience.'"

None of this holds up. U.S. corporate media routinely publishes illegal leaks of classified information. Manning offered the documents he had already downloaded to both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*- and he was rejected. Only then did he approach WikiLeaks.

The allegation that Assange tried to help crack a computer password has been doing the rounds since 2010. The DoJ under Obama refused to go for it, aware of what it would mean in terms of potentially outlawing investigative journalism.

No wonder U.S. corporate media, deprived of a major scoop, subsequently started to dismiss WikiLeaks as a Russian agent.

The Nuclear Option

The great Daniel "Pentagon Papers" Ellsberg had already [warned](#) back in 2017:

"Obama having opened the legal campaign against the press by going after the roots of investigative reporting on national security - the sources - Trump is going to go after the gatherers/gardeners themselves (and their bosses, publishers). To switch the metaphor, an indictment of Assange is a 'first use' of 'the nuclear option' against the First Amendment protection of a free press."

The current DoJ charges - basically stealing a computer password - are just the tip of the avalanche. At least for now, publishing is not a crime. Yet if extradited, Assange may be additionally charged with extra conspiracies and even violation of the 1917 Espionage Act.

Even if they must still seek consent from London to bring further charges, there's no shortage of DoJ lawyers able to apply sophistry to conjure a crime out of thin air.

Jennifer Robinson, Assange's very able lawyer, has correctly stressed his arrest is "a free speech issue" because it "is all about the ways in which journalists can communicate with their sources." The invaluable Ray McGovern, who knows one or two things about the U.S. intel community, has evoked a [requiem of the fourth estate](#).

The full context of Assange's arrest comes to light when examined as sequential to Chelsea Manning spending a month in solitary confinement in a Virginia jail for refusing to denounce Assange in front of a grand jury. There's no doubt the DoJ tactic is to break Manning by any means available.

Here's [Manning's legal team](#):

“The indictment against Julian Assange unsealed today was obtained a year to the day before Chelsea appeared before the grand jury and refused to give testimony. The fact that this indictment has existed for over a year underscores what Chelsea’s legal team and Chelsea herself have been saying since she was first issued a subpoena to appear in front of a Federal Grand Jury in the Eastern District of Virginia – that compelling Chelsea to testify would have been duplicative of evidence already in the possession of the grand jury, and was not needed in order for U.S. Attorneys to obtain an indictment of Mr Assange.”

The Deep State Attacks

The ball is now in a UK court. Assange will most certainly linger in prison for a few months for skipping bail while the extradition to the U.S. dossier proceeds. The DoJ arguably has discussed with London how a “correct” judge may deliver the desired outcome.

Assange is a publisher. He leaked absolutely nothing. *The New York Times*, as well as *The Guardian*, also published what Manning uncovered. [Collateral Murder](#), among tens of thousands of pieces of evidence, should always be at the forefront of the whole discussion – this is about war crimes committed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

So it’s no wonder the U.S. Deep State will never forgive Manning and Assange, even as *The New York Times*, in another glaring instance of double standards, may get a pass. The drama will eventually need closure at the Eastern District of Virginia because the national security and intel apparatus has been working on this screenplay, full-time, for years.

As CIA director, Mike Pompeo did cut to the chase: “It is time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is: a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia.”

What amounts to a de facto declaration of war underlines how dangerous WikiLeaks actually is, just because it practiced investigative journalism.

The current DoJ charges have absolutely nothing to do with the debunked Russia-gate. But expect the subsequent political football to be bombastic.

The Trump camp at the moment is divided. Assange is either a pop hero fighting the Deep State swamp or a lowly Kremlin stooge. At the same time, Joe Manchin, a southerner Democrat Senator, rejoices, on the record, as an ersatz 19th-century plantation owner, that Assange is now “our property.” The Democrat strategy will be to use Assange to get to Trump.

And then there’s the EU, of which Britain may eventually not be part of, later rather than sooner. The EU will be very vigilant on Assange being extradited to “Trump’s America,” as the Deep State makes sure that journalists everywhere actually do have a right, to always remain silent.

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