

Assange's Seventeenth Day at the Old Bailey: Embassy Espionage, Contemplated Poisoning and Proposed Kidnapping

September 30. Central Criminal Court, London.

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Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

Today will be remembered as a grand expose. It was a direct, pointed accusation at the intentions of the US imperium which long for the scalp of the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. For WikiLeaks, it was a smouldering triumph, showing that the entire mission against Assange, from the start, has been a political one. The Australian publisher faces the incalculably dangerous prospect of 17 charges under the US Espionage Act and one under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. Stripped to its elements, the indictment is merely violence kitted out in the vestment of sham legality. The rest is politics.

Witness [statements were read](#) from a veritable who's who of courageous investigative journalism (Patrick Cockburn, Andy Worthington, Stefania Maurizi and Ian Cobain) and an assortment of legal freight from Guy Goodwin-Gill, professor of law at the University of New South Wales, Robert Boyle, well versed in the dark practices of grand juries and Jameel Jaffer of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University.

These statements, pointing to the value of the WikiLeaks publications, the care taken in releasing them, and the terrifying prospects for press freedom, deserve separate treatment. But Wednesday's grand show was stolen by two anonymous witnesses, occasioned by a change of plans. Originally scheduled for Thursday, testimony of the witnesses from the Spanish security firm UC Global S.L. were moved a day forward. Both speak to the aims and ambitions of the company's owner and director, David Morales, who passed information on Assange and his meetings with allies and associates to the US intelligence service while the Australian was resident in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London. Judge Vanessa Baraitser had relented on the issue of keeping their anonymity: to have not observed the convention would have been a mark of disrespect for the Spanish court.

Their material is part of a current investigation into Morales being conducted by a magistrate of the Audiencia Nacional court. That process [was instigated](#) at the behest of Assange's legal team, whose filed criminal complaint alleges breaches of privacy and the violation of attorney-client privilege, amongst other charges.

Illegal agreements are born

Witness #1 [informed the court](#) of a man determined: Morales "showed at times a real obsession in relatio to monitoring and recording the lawyers who met with the 'guest' (Julian

Assange) because 'our American friends' were requesting it."

The first witness added stitching to the account linking the UC Global with US intelligence. In July 2016, with UC Global already contracted and providing security services to the Ecuadorean embassy, Morales "travelled to a security sector trade fair in Las Vegas, which I wished to accompany him". This would not be. Morales "insisted he had to travel alone. On this trip, Mr Morales showcased the company UC Global in the Las Vegas security sector trade fair."

What followed was UC Global obtaining "a flashy contract, personally managed by David Morales, with the company Las Vegas Sands, which was owned by the tycoon Sheldon Adelson, whose proximity to Donald Trump is public knowledge (at the time Trump was the presidential candidate)." Morales's point of contact at Las Vegas Sands was its chief of security, Zohar Lahav. Lahav is also [the subject of interest](#) for the Audiencia Nacional, which has asked the US Department of Justice to seek a statement from him. The investigating judge, José de la Mata, is keen to examine details of the Morales-Lahav association and whether their meetings involved discussing information illegally obtained from Assange.

UC Global was hired to provide security services to Queen Miri, the luxury vessel owned by Adelson.

"The contract did not make sense," [claimed](#) the witness. Morales seemed to be overegging the pudding. "The most striking thing about it was that he boat had its own security, which consisted of a sophisticated security detail, and that the contract consisted in adding an additional person, in this case David Morales, for a very short period of time, through which David Morales would receive an elevated sum."

Thrilled at getting the contract, Morales was in celebratory mood, gathering employees in the Jerez company office to say that "we have moved up and from now on we will be playing in the big league". What did "big league" mean? Morales, replying to the query from the first witness, claimed that "he had switched over to 'the dark side' referring to cooperating with US authorities, and as a result of that collaboration, 'the Americans will get us contracts all over the world'." In 2017, Morales asked for a secure phone and encrypted computer to communicate with his American contacts.

Along with news of the contract came an uncomfortable revelation: "that we had entered into illegal agreements with US authorities to supply them with sensitive information about Mr Assange and [Ecuadorean President] Rafael Correa, given that UC Global was responsible for the embassy security where Mr Assange was located." As a result of this parallel agreement, "reports would also be sent to 'the dark side'." Morales made regular trips to the US to facilitate this, "principally to New York but also Chicago and Washington" where he would "talk with 'our American friends'." The first witness pressed Morales at points who these "'American friends' were". "US intelligence," came the reply.

When confronted by the first witness that UC Global should not be engaged in such activities, Morales huffed. He would open his shirt in defiance, and claim with brio that he was "a mercenary, through and through".

The first witness also testified that Morales's trips to see his "American friends" increased with frequency in 2017. Trump's victory seemed to be the catalyst. By June or July 2017, "Morales began to develop a sophisticated information collection system outside the embassy." He asked employees "physically inside the embassy to intensify and deepen their information collection." The internal and external cameras of the embassy were to be changed. Morales, according to the first witness, had also "instructed a team to travel regularly to London to collect the camera recordings."

Tasks forces and surveillance

Witness #2, an IT expert, [told](#) the Old Bailey how he was asked to "form a task force of workers at our headquarters in Jerez" between June and July 2017. "The purpose of this unit was to execute, from a technical perspective, the capture, systematization and processing of information collected at the embassy that David Morales requested." Witness #2 was responsible for "executing David Morales's orders, with technical means that existed in the embassy and additional measures that were installed by order of Morales, in addition to the information gathered in the embassy by the UC Global employees who were physically present in the diplomatic mission."

The second witness [sensed inconsistencies](#). Morales told the task force that the contract with Ecuador necessitated the replacement of the embassy's cameras every three years. "This made no sense because the contract had been in force for longer than three years and the clause had not been fulfilled to date." While he was unaware of the clause, the second witness considered that the circuit operating CCTV security cameras at the time "were sufficient to provide physical security against intrusion inside the building."

But Morales was adamant. Security cameras with concealed audio recording capabilities were to be acquired and installed. "Because of this, and in accordance with the orders of David Morales, who claimed that all of this was necessary to fulfil the contract, I sought providers for these types of cameras, insisting in, to the extent possible, concealing audio-recording capabilities."

The extent of Morales's zeal [alarmed](#) the second witness. "Around June 2017, while I was sourcing providers for the new camera equipment, David Morales instructed that the cameras should allow streaming capabilities so that 'our friends' in the United States', as Morales explicitly put it, would be able to gain access to the interior of the embassy in real time. This request alarmed me greatly, and in order to impede the request, I claimed that remote access via streaming via the camera circuit was not technically achievable." The witness did not "want to collaborate in an illegal act of this magnitude." He noted Morales's wish to have the entire embassy bugged and suggested that the purpose of installing microphones had been "per the request of the United States" to target Assange's defence team.

Stunned by its illegality, the second witness tried to dissuade Morales by suggesting that Assange would detect the recording facilities. But in early December 2017, the cameras, enabled with audio-recording means, were installed. When asked by Assange and the Political Counselor Maria Eugenia whether the new devices recorded sound, the second witness [had his orders](#): to not "share information about the system and to deny that the cameras were recording audio." Once in place, "the cameras began to record sound regularly so every meeting that the asylee held was captured."

The second witness was also heavy [on detail](#) in various specific operations designed to frustrate Assange's own countering efforts. He had been asked by Morales in January 2018 to place rigid stickers on the external embassy windows at the top left hand corner. It transpired that this seemingly idiosyncratic exercise had one express purpose: to neutralise the disruptions to recording conversations caused by Assange's white noise machine, which "produced a vibration in the window that stopped the sound being extracted via the laser microphone, which US intelligence had installed outside." The stickers served to eliminate the vibration, enabling the laser microphones to "extract conversations."

Morales had [also impressed upon](#) the IT specialist that he install a microphone in the PVC folder of the fire extinguisher in the embassy meeting room used by Assange. The same was done for "the toilet at the end of the embassy" as it had become a venue of "strategic" importance: Assange "who suspected that he was the subject of espionage, maintained many of his meetings there in order to preserve confidentiality."

While a whole range of targets were of interest, the Spanish former judge and member of Assange's legal team, Baltasar Garzón, was particularly important. "The security guards at the embassy were requested to search for evidence of travels to Argentina and Russia in Garzón's passport pages, which were photographed."

Nappies, contemplated kidnappings and proposed poisonings

Such behaviour at the embassy conformed to a consistent pattern of instructions that verged on the comic and grotesque. On one occasion, recalled Witness #2, Morales [had asked him](#) to "steal a nappy of a baby which according to the company's security personnel deployed at the embassy, regularly visited Mr Assange." The pilfering of the nappy was for reasons of identifying whether the baby was, in fact "a child of the asylee." It was "the Americans", Morales claimed, "who wanted to establish paternity."

Not content merely with establishing paternity, Morales's "American friends" were also suffering from states of desperation, keen to bring Assange's stay in the embassy to an end. According to the second witness, "the Americans were desperate [in December 2017] and that they had even suggested that more extreme measures should be employed against the 'guest' to put an end to the situation of Assange's permanence in the embassy." Suggestions were made to Morales by his US contacts: the door of the embassy would be left open; an "accident" could be claimed for covering an operation "which would allow persons to enter from outside the embassy and kidnap the asylee". Another option was put on the table: "the possibility of poisoning Mr Assange". Such suggestions, Witness #2 [claimed](#), "shocked" the employees, who "commented amongst ourselves that the course that Morales had embarked on was beginning to become dangerous."

The eviction and arrest of Assange followed. Witness #1 [informed](#) Assange's legal team that Morales had "betrayed both the terms of the contract and the trust that had been given to him by the Government of Ecuador, by systematically handing over information to US intelligence agencies." He came to realise that information on the security of the embassy and Rafael Correa had been sold to "the enemy, the United States, which is the reason I put an end to my professional relationship with him."

These revelations excited Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, having already etched his name into legal history at these proceedings with supporting testimony. In [his optimistic view](#), such evidence of surveillance by the CIA of Assange's conversations with his

legal team “and everyone else” in the embassy, along with suggestions of poisoning and kidnapping, might mean him walking free. “That’s essentially the same information that ended my case and confronted [President Richard] Nixon with impeachment, leading to his resignation!” Convincing to Ellsberg it may be, but will it sway the icy temperament of Judge Vanessa Baraitser?

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