

Shifting the Centre of Gravity: Julian Assange Receives His Passport

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

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In March 2008, one Michael Horvath of the US Army Counterintelligence Center within the Cyber Intelligence Assessments Branch considered the risks posed by WikiLeaks in a [32 page document](#). Created under the auspices of the Department of Defence's Intelligence Analysis Program. The overview suggests, importantly, the interest shown in Assange by the defence wing of the United States at the time it was starting to make more than a generous ripple across the pond of information discourse. Importantly, it suggests a direct interest of the military industrial complex in the activities of a guerrilla (read radical transparency) group.

The question it asks remains a source of ongoing interest and curiosity about the role played by WikiLeaks in the information wars: "Wikileaks.org - An Online Reference to Foreign Intelligence Services, Insurgents, or Terrorist Groups?" The answer is implicit in the text: its all of the above.

The document remains salient for the persistent strategy adopted against WikiLeaks and its chief publishing head throughout. To avoid the integrity and credibility of the information, target the man, the organisation and the method. Suggest he is wonky, a crank, generally wobbly on principles and ethics. Suggest, as well, that his reputation is questionable, as are his moral inclinations.

The document highlights a feature that gained momentum in the 2016 US presidential elections: that WikiLeaks might serve "as an instrument of propaganda, and is a front organisation for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)." (The only difference in 2016 was that the CIA had fallen out of the orbit of paranoid reckoning, replaced by wily Russian operatives in the US imaginary of electoral manipulation.) Not only had the organisation denied this, there was "no evidence" mustered "to support such assertions."

The DoD document makes the objective clear; nothing else will suffice than a campaign ranging on various fronts to target WikiLeaks and its system of obtaining and releasing information.

"The identification, exposure, termination of employment, criminal prosecution, legal action against current and former insiders, leakers or whistleblowers could potentially damage or destroy the center of gravity and deter others considering similar actions from using the WikiLeaks.org Web site."

The centre of gravity here is a critical point. It is one that is being persistently targeted, using Assange as convenient focal point of derangement, treachery and both. The [memo](#)

from Ecuadorean officials from October last year was a laundry list for model good behaviour, effectively the conditions of his continued tenancy in the embassy, along with using the internet. Press outlets saw it as lunacy taking hold. He had to refrain from “interfering in the internal affairs of other states” and activities “that could prejudice Ecuador’s good relations with other states.” His pet cat also had to be looked after lest it be banished to an animal shelter. Sanitation was also noted.

Each granular detail of his fate garners international headlines in an ongoing battle of attrition. Will he step out? Will he seek medical treatment he urgently needs? What will the local constabulary do? Statements from the Metropolitan Police and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office suggest that he will be medically tended to but will also have to face the charge of violating his bail conditions when he entered the Ecuadorean embassy in 2012. Once that door opens, the narrow horizon to a US prison cell becomes a realistic prospect, even if it is bound to be a protracted matter.

The recent turn has also excited commentary, though it is not the same mould as the cudgel like recommendations of the 2008 DoD memo. The Australian dissident figure of the publishing world has been granted a passport by the Australian authorities. This was something, if only to suggest that those in Canberra, previously keen to see Assange given the roughing over, had warmed somewhat. In 2016, the then Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop had, at the very least, offered Assange what he was due: consular assistance.

While the grant took place either last September or October, confirmation of its existence was revealed in a Senate estimates hearing. Australian Senator Rex Patrick of the Centre Alliance pressed officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade whether they had engaged their US counterparts about possible safe passage for Assange in the event he left the embassy.

DFAT’s chief legal officer James Larsen [claimed](#) to have no knowledge of any US proceedings against Assange (untutored, mute and ill-informed is Larsen, on this subject); that being so, there was nothing to discuss. “We are not aware, on the Australian government’s side, of any legal proceedings initiated within, or by, the United States, concerning Assange.” Larsen had no “record before me of what our engagement with the United States is specifically concerning Mr Assange.”

What mattered were the remarks made by first assistance secretary of the Consular and Crisis Management Division.

“Mr Assange,” Andrew Todd [confirmed](#), “does have an Australian passport.”

Some lifting of the dark had taken place, suggesting, as one of legal advisers, Greg Barnes, has been [saying](#) for some time:

“The Australian government does have a role to play in the resolution of the Julian Assange case.”

A potential stumbling block for Assange in getting a passport was section 13 of the *Australian Passports Act 2005*. Facing a “serious foreign offence” within that section’s

meaning would have scotched the application. "In order to progress your application," DFAT informed him, "we require confirmation that section 13 is not enlivened by your circumstances. To this end, we ask that you provide us with confirmation that section 13 no longer applies to you. Until this time, your passport application will remain on hold."

There is an element of dark farce to this. To show that he was eligible to receive a passport, he had to show that he did not face a serious foreign offence. But pieced evidence revealed thus far demonstrates that a US prosecution assisted by a range of security agencies has busied themselves with making sure he does face such an offence. Thankfully, WikiLeaks has not been able, in their quest for a totally transparent record, to find any relevant corroborating indictment, a point that seemed to seep through the Senate estimates hearings. In such cases, ignorance can remain, if not blissful, then useful.

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