

The Wikileaks Arrest: Unfolding Epic Drama

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An epic drama is unfolding after the Wikileaks founder gave himself up to Scotland Yard, but will Assange suffer the fate of Ellsberg or Pollard

It was United States president Woodrow Wilson who called for “open diplomacy” — number one of his fourteen points in 1918 — so that “diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.” He would surely approve of Wikileaks’ efforts at open diplomacy, though current US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called them “an attack on America’s foreign-policy interests” and indeed on “the international community”, though she failed to specify which particular community members were the victims, or what they were the victims of.

On 7 December, the bane of US empire voluntarily gave himself up to Scotland Yard and will face trial and extradition to Sweden possibly by the end of the year, accused of “rape, unlawful coercion and two counts of sexual molestation”, alleged to have been committed in August 2010. The trumped-up cases involve consensual relations, one an obvious “honey trap” by a CIA plant and the other a spurned Lewinsky-like groupie.

Assange is nothing short of a legend after a year of leaks, especially an April video taken from a US helicopter in Iraq in 2007 showing GIs shooting at least 12 innocent Iraqis like rabbits. Starting in July, he issued 500,000 US military documents on the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The straw for the imperial camel was a batch of 250,000 US diplomatic notes (1966-2009) in November, revealing a US diplomatic world increasingly acting as a branch of the CIA, and the cynicism of both Western and Arab regimes anxious to destroy Iran.

The leaks have been hailed as a blow to US criminal activity by people around the world, including staunchly American US Congressman [Ron Paul](#), and condemned by lovers of US empire such as former US vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who called for Assange to be “pursued with the same urgency we pursue Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders”. Former UK Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind said WikiLeaks’ actions were “active assistance to terrorist organisations”, neglecting to reflect on the UK’s own long history of worldwide terrorist activities.

The 39-year-old Assange is an Australian citizen, though his Prime Minister Julia Gillard has threatened to cancel his passport. He is described by colleagues as charismatic, driven and highly intelligent, with an exceptional ability to crack computer codes. To his critics, he is just a publicity-seeker and womaniser.

In 1995 he was accused with a friend of dozens of hacking activities and fined, promising to be a good boy. He quietly co-authored *Underground* with Suelette Dreyfus, dealing with the subversive side of the Internet. Dreyfus described Assange as “quite interested in the

concept of ethics, concepts of justice, what governments should and shouldn't do".

He began Wikileaks in 2006 as a "dead-letterbox" for would-be leakers — the real heroes of this saga, the unknown soldiers disgusted with their role as hired killers. His collective developed a Robin Hood guerrilla lifestyle, moving communications and people from country to country to make use of laws protecting freedom of speech. Co-founder Daniel Schmitt describes Assange as "one of the few people who really care about positive reform in this world to a level where you're willing to do something radical".

Wikileaks was forced this year to switch to a Swiss host server after several US Internet service providers shut him down, claiming he was endangering lives, though he made clear he was careful to vet the military cables from Afghanistan and Iraq precisely to avoid this. His site also came under cyber attack and PayPal cut off his ability to raise funds.

There is no doubt that Gillard, the Swedish prosecutor, PayPal, etc are all being pressured by the US government to help snuff out this ray of light exposing its many crimes. Only French Internet service provider OVH said it had no plans to end the service it provides to Wikileaks, and a judge threw out Industry Minister Eric Besson's case to force it to.

Hackivist admirers of Mr Quixote have set up mirror sites faster than traditional servers can shut Wikileaks down and are launching denial-of-service attacks targeting its Internet enemies. Coldblood, a member of the computer group Anonymous, told BBC, "Websites that are bowing down to government pressure have become targets. We feel that Wikileaks has become more than just about leaking of documents, it has become a war ground, the people vs the government."

The Man of La Mancha fought off more than "100 legal attacks" before his arrest, including one by Swiss banks whose illicit offshore activities were exposed. That case too was dismissed and left the bankers to scramble to protect their ill-gotten gains.

The show goes on. Wikileaks spokesman Kristinn Hrafnsson said Assange's arrest was an attack on media freedom but assured, "Wikileaks is operational. We are continuing on the same track as laid out before." Assange — or his colleagues still at large — hopes to set up a number of "independent chapters around the world" as well as to act as a middle-man between sources and newspapers.

Strangely, he has been attacked on the left as a stooge of the CIA or Israel, though the former makes no sense at all. True, the latter comes off relatively clean amidst the diplomatic cesspool. But what the few tight-lipped US diplo leaks relating to Israel really show is the fear that US diplomats have of saying anything negative about Israel. Perhaps they fear they will be passed over for their "anti-Semitism" or perhaps they fear that all their missives are read by Mossad as a matter of course.

A terse cable from the US embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan compares Israeli-Azeri relations ominously to an "iceberg with nine-tenths unseen". Another polite one from Tel Aviv reveals that several "OT" (organised crime) figures applied for visas to attend a "security conference" in Los Vegas but thankfully didn't come back when asked for their prison records in Russia.

An interesting comparison is between Assange and another exposé of US military secrets, Jonathan Pollard, the (only) US-Israel spy serving a life sentence he received in 1987 for

revealing US military secrets. The big difference, of course, is Pollard did not apply the “open diplomacy” principle. If he had blacked out the sensitive names, and exposed the secrets to broad daylight, like Assange, he could have had a beneficial influence on world politics. Instead he sold the secrets to Israel, and uncounted CIA agents lost their lives in the Soviet Union as a result.

Another worthy comparison is with the legendary Daniel Ellsberg, leaker of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, who like Assange, gave himself up and faced the music, which turned out to be sweet. The judge dismissed all charges against him in 1973 and the *New York Times* pompously applauded him in 1996, saying that the papers demonstrated “that the Johnson Administration had systematically lied” about “a subject of transcendent national interest and significance.”

Ellsberg and Assange, following the advice of Woodrow Wilson, are heroes. Pollard, truly a villain, is worshipped today in Israel, where his 9000th day in prison last year was commemorated with a light show on the walls of the old city of Jerusalem. Last month 39 Congressmen petitioned US President Barack Obama to pardon him. Last summer, Netanyahu had the gall to offer to hold off a few more months on settlements if Obama freed him.

Will Assange suffer the fate of Pollard or Ellsberg? The US military machine was in disarray in 1971 and Ellsberg gave it a brave shove and helped bring the troops home. But this is 2010. The open calls to free Pollard are treated as a matter of course. While the Hillaries and Sarahs are calling to assassinate Assange for doing something noble, their like are calling to free a traitor who was responsible for betraying his country and causing untold deaths of US officials.

The sides are lining up, much like Bush predicted in 2001 with his “You are with us or against us.” A brave Aussie, a principled French judge, an American libertarian congressman, a youthful computer nerd — the enemies of empire come in all shapes and sizes.

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