

Turning Tides: The US Congress and Julian Assange

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"Every government is run by liars and nothing they say should be believed." — I.F. Stone

The US Congress and Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, have what can only be regarded as a testy relationship. Its various members have advocated and condoned his farcical prosecution, demanded his lifelong incarceration, even assassination, taking issue with his appetite for publishing unsavoury, classified details about the US imperium. He who gives the game away on cant will be punished.

One shrill voice, touching on delirium, was Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, former Senate Homeland Security Committee Chairman. His [response](#) to the Cablegate release was more than a touch unhinged. "WikiLeaks' deliberate disclosure of these diplomatic cables is nothing less than an attack on the national security of the United States, as well as that of dozens of other countries."

Lieberman thought the disclosure of such State Department treasure "an outrageous, reckless and despicable action that will undermine the ability of our government and our partners to keep our people safe and to work together to defend our vital interests. Let there be no doubt: the individuals responsible are going to have blood on their hands."

On December 1, 2010, Rep. Candice Miller (R-MI) [was also forthright](#) before fellow House Representatives in arguing that both WikiLeaks and its founder "should be facing criminal charges; and his Web site, which he uses to aid and abet our terrorist enemies, should be shut down to defend our national security." Showing an astonishing latitude of muddled understanding, Miller urged the Obama administration to treat "WikiLeaks for what it is - a terrorist organization, whose continued operation threatens our security."

The previous day, Arizona Republican Rep. Trent Franks [bleated](#) in the House that Assange had "provided a wealth of aid and comfort to groups that are at war with the United States of America." It was simply not possible for Franks to envisage that Assange might have engaged in an exercise of transparency. "The reality is that his desire to promote himself has outweighed his concern for scores and perhaps hundreds of innocent lives that he has

endangered with his reckless publicity in this kind of stunt in the guise of some greater cause.”

That libel, despite mountainous evidence to the contrary, much of it submitted during the trial proceedings at the Old Bailey in London, persists in the abominably drafted and dangerous Department of Justice [indictment](#) against Assange.

In time, the Russian canard filtered through the woolly-headed lawmakers, turning them into apoplectic seekers of revenge. “Whatever Julian Assange’s intentions were for WikiLeaks,” [opined](#) Virginia Democratic Senator Mark Warner, “what he’s become is a direct participant in Russian efforts to weaken the West and undermine American security.” To that end, he hoped that the “British courts will quickly transfer him to US custody so he can finally get the justice he deserves.” Such is the call of the angry tribe on The Hill.

At times, the odd voice of defence has surfaced. The problematic Rep. Dana Rohrabacher from California [called](#) Assange “a very honourable man”. He is also alleged to have been President Donald Trump’s envoy in attempting to broker a failed pardon deal with Assange while he was in the Ecuadorian embassy.

In January 2021, former Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard from Hawaii [urged](#) Trump, in his last days, to “pardon Julian Assange as one of his final acts before leaving the White House. The prosecution against the Australian was “a direct threat to a free press & freedom of speech for every American.” In her response to Assange’s eviction from the Ecuadorian embassy and subsequent arrest, Gabbard [had this to say](#): “I think what is happening here is ... some form of retaliation coming from the government, saying, ‘Hey, this is what happens when you release information that we don’t want you to release.’”

To target Assange was to get on “such a dangerous and slippery slope, not only for journalists, not only for those in the media, but also for every American that our government can and has the power to kind of lay down the hammer to say, ‘Be careful, be quiet and fall into line, otherwise we have the means to come after you.’”

The latest move by Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) promises to be something more. Tlaib [has urged](#) that fellow members put aside their differences and append their signatures in a letter to Attorney-General Merrick Garland urging him to drop the charges. “I know that many of us have very strong feelings about Mr Assange, but what we think of him and his actions is really beside the point here.” The instrument being used in prosecuting Assange was “the notoriously undemocratic Espionage Act”, one that “seriously undermines freedom of the press and the First Amendment.”

Tlaib acknowledged the views of press freedom, civil liberty and human rights groups, all warning “that the charges against Mr Assange pose a grave and unprecedented threat to everyday, constitutionally protected journalistic activity, and that a conviction would represent a landmark setback for the First Amendment.”

The letter also pays lip service to US self-interest: pardon the prisoner to burnish the reputation. The prosecution of Assange’s journalism had greatly undermined “the United States’ moral standing on the world stage, and effectively granting cover to authoritarian governments who can (and do) point to Assange’s prosecution to reject evidence-based criticisms of their human rights records and as a precedent that justifies the criminalization of reporting on their activities.”

Not even the long-winded nature of the words diminishes the fundamental wisdom and aim of the letter. To date, [signatures have been collected](#) from Democratic Reps. Jamaal Bowman, Ilhan Omar and Cori Bush. A spokesperson for Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has stated that she will sign before the closure of the letter. While it's a start, it cannot come too soon for the ailing publisher and Belmarsh Prison's most famous political prisoner.

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