

## The Assange Case

# An Innocent Man Pleads Guilty, While the Criminals He Exposed Are Still Committing War Crimes

by Harley Schlanger

July 12—One can't help feeling happy for Julian Assange, who was freed on June 26 after five years spent mostly in solitary confinement, in Belmarsh Prison near London, a venue known as Britain's Guantanamo. His time there was preceded by seven years spent in asylum in uncomfortable quarters in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. On June 27, he was reunited with his family in Australia, freed at last from a Kafkaesque ordeal. The last five years were spent fighting extradition to the U.S., where he was facing 17 new charges from a May 2019 indictment under the U.S. Espionage Act, which carried a maximum sentence of 170 years.<sup>1</sup> With his guilty plea, he was given a 62-month sentence, but released for time already served in prison.

Yet, the "happy end" is not the real story here. Assange was released only after agreeing to plead guilty to one felony count under the Espionage Act, of "Conspiracy to Obtain and Disclose National Defense Information." In front of the judge who ultimately freed him, he pled guilty, then defended his actions, saying he acted as a journalist, seeking information from sources, which he said he viewed as both legal and protected by the U.S. Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

Since the terms of his release included acceptance



Cancillería del Ecuador/David G Silvers

*Julian Assange, during his seven years' asylum in the Embassy of Ecuador in London.*

of a guilty plea, his decision to take it after five years of torture cannot be held against him. Instead, the larger concern is that those U.S. government officials whose crimes he exposed by publishing classified documents on his Wikileaks website, have yet to be held accountable for repeated violations of international law and human rights. What Assange published was truthful, and damaging to the image of the United States, as the self-proclaimed defender of the "rules-based order." It also provides an example of why the Founding Fathers included among the prescribed Constitutional rights the freedom of the press.

The persecution he faced as a result of what he published in Wikileaks makes a mockery of the U.S. boasting about "transparency" and "democracy." And that is why his case, and his brutal treatment by authorities acting on behalf of the U.S. government, was an issue of concern for citizens worldwide, many of

1. The 2019 indictment was brought by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) under President Trump. The legal battle to extradite Assange to the U.S. to stand trial was pursued by the Biden DOJ.

2. His exact words to the judge were, "Working as a journalist, I encouraged my source to provide information that was said to be classified in order to publish that information. I believed the First Amendment protected that activity." He added, "I believe the First Amendment and the Espionage Act are in contradiction," thus mildly expressing defiance toward the "legal" efforts to silence him.

whom have participated in demonstrations demanding his release.

## What Assange Did

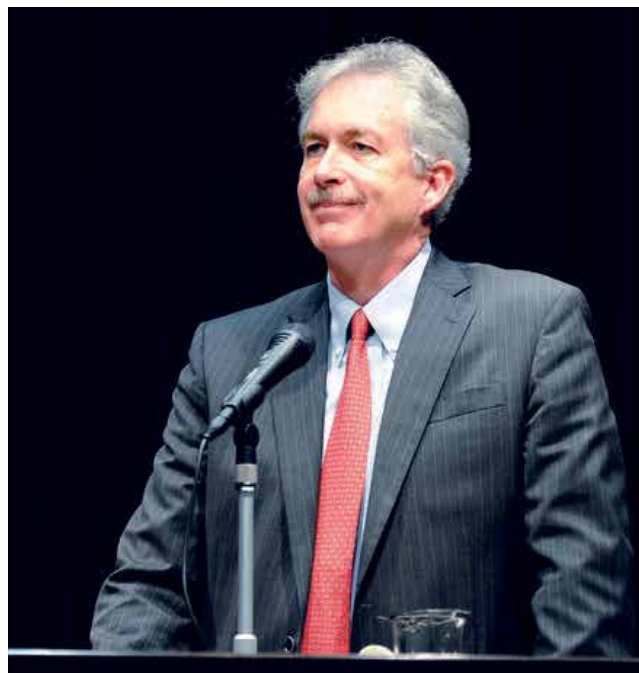
The documents published by Assange revealed war crimes committed by officials in the executive branch’s national security team, intelligence, and military, during the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies. There were more than 90,000 documents related to the war in Afghanistan; 400,000 from the Iraq war; files exposing violations of the Geneva Convention in the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo, including evidence that many of those held and tortured had committed no crimes; files related to spying by the National Security Agency, on both American citizens and foreign officials—such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel; diplomatic cables from U.S. embassies, which provided glimpses of the role played by officials in interfering in the affairs of the countries where they were stationed; and the release of the 2016 Clinton campaign documents, which Assange was falsely accused of having received from Russian hackers as part of a Putin conspiracy to smear Hillary Clinton and elect Donald Trump. This false charge, along with the equally fraudulent allegations contained in the Christopher Steele dossier, were the basis for the still-ongoing Russiagate fiction of “Russian interference” in the 2016 presidential election.

Assange did not steal these documents, and Wikileaks did not hack them. His “crime” was publishing them.

Among the documents which drew the most attention were those describing the systemic torture of prisoners in Iraq and in Guantanamo. The U.S. government and military authorities denied that they were using torture to extract confessions and “obtain information.” The documents released told a different story, exposing both the torture which was employed, and the cover-up of violations of international law, which had become routine.

## ‘Inconvenient Truths’

An example of the “inconvenient truths” published by Wikileaks is that of the famous “Nyet means Nyet” cable sent by then-U.S. Ambassador to Russia William Burns on February 1, 2008. Anticipating that NATO might offer Ukraine membership at its upcoming summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Burns warned in his memo that there would be a vehement reaction from



U.S. State Department

*U.S. Ambassador William Burns’s 2008 warning about Russia’s reaction to NATO expansion—“nyet means nyet”—was one of the “inconvenient truths” published by Wikileaks.*

Russian officials to that proposal. His memo was titled “Nyet Means Nyet [No Means No]: Russia’s NATO Enlargement Redlines,” a theme reiterated in a sub-head, “NATO Enlargement: Potential Military Threat to Russia.” To amplify this point, Burns wrote:

Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin’s sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.

Burns’ memo makes it clear that NATO membership was viewed by Russians as a “red line” going back to at least 2008, and undermines the argument presented after the February 24, 2022 invasion that Russia’s move into Ukraine was “unprovoked.” Rather, Ukraine’s potential entry into NATO clearly would be a provocation, and those still repeating the “unprovoked” narrative today should have been totally discredited.

The slanders against him, epitomized by the charges that his publication of classified documents threatened the lives of U.S. agents, and the subsequent persecution of him in prison, are part of the bigger picture of the Assange affair, with far-reaching effects. The target of these attacks was not simply Assange, but any journalist committed to exposing official violations of international law. It is to send a message to journalists and publications: Do not report our crimes; instead submit to censorship and publish our lies, or you might be the next Assange!<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that such threats work. The U.S. government continues to engage in illegal spying, election interference, running coups and color revolutions, covert ops and secret wars, all in defense of the crumbling Unipolar Order. Of course, much of this is done out of sight of the public, as freedom of the press has been undermined, and submissive reporters refuse to challenge the hybrid warfare/disinformation regime of the Censorship-Industrial Complex, in order to keep their jobs.

The fight for truth and transparency, as waged heroically by Assange, must continue, for it is a fight to make officials accountable for their actions, and to protect the freedom of press and speech which are enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. It is also a fight for you, the citizen, as censorship and disinformation are designed to induce pessimism, a sense that you can-

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3. One of those most opposed to allowing Assange to go free was former CIA Director and Secretary of State under President Trump, Mike Pompeo. According to a story in *Yahoo News*, Pompeo at the CIA organized a plan to kidnap and assassinate Assange. In a speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies on April 13, 2017, Pompeo called Wikileaks “a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia.”

Pompeo was particularly angry that Wikileaks exposed the “Vault 7” surveillance plan for warrantless spying on Americans. One official involved in the discussion of kidnapping and killing Assange described the flight-forward mentality of Pompeo and his closest allies engaged in the planning, who were “so embarrassed about Vault 7 ... They were seeing blood.” (“Kidnapping, assassination and a London shoot-out: Inside the CIA’s secret war plans against WikiLeaks,” by Zach Dorfman, Sean Naylor and Michael Isikoff, *Yahoo News*, Sept. 26 2021.)



U.S. Army/Spc. Chalton Hutson

*The pleasant side of Detention Camp VI of the Guantanamo prison camp. Wikileaks exposed the U.S.-run prison for torture and other gross violations of the Geneva Convention used against prisoners there.*

not know what is true, and that there is nothing you can do about it anyway. By waging this fight for the accountability of public officials, and inspiring activism in the citizens, the sacrifices of Julian Assange and other journalists who have sacrificed for the sake of defending the rights of all citizens, are honored.

A crucial battle in this fight for accountability and defense of free speech, is the exoneration of economist and statesman Lyndon LaRouche. The same network of corrupt officials in the permanent bureaucracy of the Justice Department and their mouthpieces in the mainstream media which targeted Assange, engaged in a campaign of nearly five decades to slander and destroy LaRouche, which ultimately put him in prison for five years starting in 1989. This “judicial” attack against LaRouche was described by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark as one which “involves a broader range of deliberate and systematic misconduct and abuse of power over a longer period of time in an effort to destroy a political movement and leader, than any other federal prosecution in my time or to my knowledge.”

With the freeing of Assange, LaRouche’s exoneration and the bringing to account those responsible for the actions against LaRouche and his movement, are necessary steps toward ending the suppression of ideas, and attacks on free speech, which will reaffirm the rights granted to all citizens by the U.S. Constitution.