

By Dennis Loo

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Newsflash: *While this article was being prepared, news came from London that Julian Assange managed to escape from his house arrest and formally requested political asylum at Ecuador's Embassy in London on June 19, 2012. Given the fact that Assange had just lost his legal appeal before the British Supreme Court to block his extradition to Sweden, discussed in part in the following article, to face what for all the world appears to be reactionary, politically motivated sex abuse charges as a prelude to possibly extraditing Assange to the U.S., and the fact that he has already been openly targeted for assassination by various high U.S. public officials and pundits (perhaps by drones), Ecuador's comments sympathetic to Assange's request is good news.*

Julian Assange, WikiLeaks' founder and leader, the international whistle-blower who has devoted himself to uncovering damning secrets that governments try to—and must—conceal from their citizens in order to carry forth with their dirty deeds, is facing an extremely serious court case that could cripple his work and that of WikiLeaks. At stake is not only Julian Assange's personal fate: should he lose, the ripples of his case (perhaps waves would be the better metaphor) both legal and political, will have profound effects on everyone who seeks justice, transparency, and fairness. What Assange is on trial for, in essence—his dastardly crime in authorities' eyes—is doing what journalists are supposed to do—tell the truth and reveal to the public corruption, malfeasance and criminal behavior, especially by those on high who have the greatest power to commit towering crimes and who have the most extensive ability to conceal their deeds in the absence of investigative journalism.

Assange (born July 3, 1971) is an Australian Internet-activist-journalist. His stepfather describes Julian as a young boy as someone who "always stood up for the underdog. I remember that, like with his school friends. He was always very angry about people ganging up on other people. He had a really good sense of equality and equity." As a young man he was a curiosity-driven hacker, later a computer programmer, then he founded WikiLeaks in the mid-2000s. He is the recipient of numerous honors, "including the 2009 Amnesty International

Media Award, Readers' Choice for *TIME* magazine's 2010 Person of the Year, the 2011 Sydney Peace Foundation gold medal and the 2011 Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism. Snorre Valen, a Norwegian parliamentarian, nominated him for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize." (From Wikipedia's bio of Assange. Wikipedia and WikiLeaks are unrelated.)

WikiLeaks maintains a website at wikileaks.org which it launched in 2006. It is perhaps most famous for its June 2010 release of the U.S. Apache Helicopter's videotape ("Collateral Murder") of its killing of nine Iraqi civilians and two Reuters journalists who were casually strolling through a Baghdad suburb in 2007 when they were fired upon and killed. After the incident, which *The New York Times* described falsely in its original article about it as a firefight by U.S. forces against "insurgents" who allegedly attacked the American troops, Reuters tried unsuccessfully for three years to get a proper accounting and explanation for the deaths of their journalists. The truth was finally revealed when WikiLeaks released the video. Private Bradley Manning was subsequently charged with treason for allegedly being the whistle-blower who made this video available to WikiLeaks.

The specifics of the case being made against Assange by authorities are these: in 2010 Sweden's chief prosecutor sought to question Assange about allegations of sexual assault and rape by two Swedish women and has been seeking his extradition to Sweden since 2010. Assange denies these accusations as utterly false.

On May 30, 2012, Britain's Supreme Court ruled in a 5-2 vote that Assange, who has been under house arrest in England while contesting Sweden's efforts to extradite him, should be turned over to Swedish authorities. The court majority held that Sweden's prosecutor is the equivalent of a "judicial authority" and therefore entitled to get his hands on Assange, even though the majority admitted that during the Parliamentary debate about the law, a British minister explicitly stated that the term "judicial authority" should be understood to be a court/judge, and not a prosecutor. How did they manage this sleight of hand? By citing the *French* meaning of the term that allegedly includes prosecutors as "judicial authorities."

What this court's decision underscores is how courts, despite their official role as impartial, law-bound entities, are all too readily subject to the will of those who rule society. As Glenn Greenwald, speaking to KPFA's *Democracy Now!*, put it on May 30, 2012:

"Julian Assange is one of the people most hated by Western governments because of the

transparency that he brought. And typically, unfortunately, judicial branches in the United States and in the United Kingdom do the opposite of what they're intended to do, which is they protect institutional power and help to punish and deprive the rights of those who are most scorned. And so, I would have been shocked had the court ruled in favor of Assange, even though, as the two dissenting judges on the high court pointed out, the argument of Sweden and those advocating extradition is directly antithetical to what the statute says. No one thinks that a prosecutor is a judicial authority. He hasn't been charged with a crime, and therefore, there's no court or judge seeking his extradition. It's purely a prosecutor. But the law in these cases typically is not what governs. What governs are political considerations and the views of the party. And so, absent some unexpected event, highly unexpected event, at some point in the near future, it's likely that he will be extradited to Sweden."

Contrary to Sweden's reputation as a more humane society, Sweden's prime minister (the equivalent of the U.S. president) publicly attacked Assange one week before Assange's hearing before the British Supreme Court, a clear attempt to poison public opinion against Assange.

Sweden's pre-trial practices, as Glenn Greenwald has described it, are "borderline barbaric." Prisoners awaiting trial are not given bail, and Assange would likely be kept in oppressive solitary confinement without any access to the outside world. The pre-trial hearings are conducted secretly, away from any public scrutiny.

The significance of this lies in the fact that the charges in Sweden are merely a prelude to getting Assange extradited to the U.S. where U.S. authorities want to charge him with espionage and eliminate him as a rival, whether through judicial hanging or the potential for an extrajudicial killing. As another indication of how high the stakes are in this matter, right after announcing that they were going to rule in the Assange appeal of extradition, Sweden tweeted that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would meet with Sweden's top officials on Sunday, June 3, 2012. This would be the first visit to Sweden by a high U.S. official in a very long time.

These charges were brought *after* Assange and WikiLeaks released to the world voluminous records that showed the U.S. government and others such as Britain and the former Tunisian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to be world-class liars and war criminals. (The damning revelations in secret U.S. diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks regarding Ben Ali's corruption played a key role in triggering the Tunisian Revolution, thus helping to spark Arab Spring. Its role vis a vis Arab Spring shows how incendiary the revelations that WikiLeaks has made public are and how powerful an ally their work has been and will be in the future for those who seek fundamental change in society.) This is, of course, precisely why U.S. imperialism's

godfathers seek to snuff out Julian Assange, WikiLeaks, whistle-blowers such as the charges brought against Bradley Manning, journalists who still regard the truth as their jobs, and all those who speak out against injustice. As it has done on so many very critical issues, the Obama administration has one-upped the Bush regime by going after whistle-blowers and journalists more aggressively than Bush and Cheney did.

WikiLeaks and Assange, in other words, are the 21st century equivalent of Daniel Ellsberg who was attacked for being a whistle-blower by the Nixon administration when he released the famous "Pentagon Papers" that showed that the U.S. government had been lying about its actions and motivations in the Vietnam war, thus helping to further fuel the anti-war movement. Because the documents that Ellsberg released and the far more extensive documentation of crimes that Assange and WikiLeaks have released posed and pose a real threat to the U.S. government's not-ready-for-prime-time real agenda, and because the documents themselves are uncontestably authentic and therefore cannot be denied as forgeries, both Ellsberg then and Assange now have been pilloried by personal assassination launched by those who stand to lose the most from their revelations. In Assange's case, these attempts to discredit him are more than "only" character assassination. They include very explicit and public demands for his murder.

No less than Vice President Joe Biden on *Meet the Press* called Assange in December 2010 a "high-tech terrorist," a term which, of course, would rightly apply to him and the Obama administration more than anyone and right-wing pundit Jonah Goldberg,

National Review

editor-at-large and American Enterprise Institute Fellow, in the October 29, 2010 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*

declared a fatwa (death warrant) against Assange asking why the CIA hadn't already offed Assange:

I'd like to ask a simple question: Why isn't Julian Assange dead?

In case you didn't know, Assange is the Australian computer programmer behind WikiLeaks, a massive—and massively successful—effort to disclose secret or classified information. In a series of recent dumps, he unveiled thousands upon thousands of classified documents from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

...

So again, I ask: Why wasn't Assange garroted in his hotel room years ago?

It's a serious question.*

The fact that a syndicated American journalist such as Jonah Goldberg, Vice President Biden, and many others who made similar grotesque calls for Assange's assassination, could do so in major American media outlets such as the *Chicago Tribune* or the pulpit of the land's highest offices and not be condemned for their bloodthirsty foaming at the mouth tells you what kind of times we are now living in: it's apparently all right if fatwas are declared by American pundits and open threats come from the mouths of our leaders,

why that's them bein' True Blue American Patriots

. But let anyone dare to tell the

truth

about

real

crimes, well those whistle-blowing traitors deserve to be tortured and die for that!

These authorities' fulminations tell us something profound about how precarious their continued rule actually is. They cannot do what they've been doing and they cannot do what they plan to do going forward if they are not able to garrot what the people know. Whistle-blowing and genuine journalism are far too damaging to their designs: real journalism reveals our leaders' hypocrisy and deceit. The workings of their system are so awful that our esteemed leaders must carry out an unprecedented level of repression against truth-telling, inquiry, and protest, or else their castles will be shaken and face ignominious destruction from the fury of the populace rising up to challenge them. WikiLeaks and Assange have already demonstrated the potential for this. We must all rise to defend Julian Assange for his heroic stand against their horrid acts so that we can create more room and not less for him and others to do what must be done.

As Tyrion Lannister in the George R.R. Martin saga that HBO has turned into the *Game of Thrones*

series says in

A Clash of Kings

, "When you tear out a man's tongue, you are not proving him a liar, you're only telling the

world that you fear what he might say."

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*Jonah Goldberg, "Why Is Assange Still Alive?" *Chicago Tribune* online, October 29, 2010, www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/ct-oped-1029-goldberg-20101029,0,5734943.story, accessed November 3, 2010.