

Antony Blinken Continues to Lecture the World on Values His Administration Aggressively Violates

How can you feign anger over others' attacks on a free press when you imprison Assange as punishment for his vital revelations about U.S. officials?

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Continuing his world tour doling out righteous lectures to the world, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday proclaimed — in a sermon you have to hear to believe — that few things are more sacred in a democracy than "independent journalism." [Speaking to Radio Free Europe](#), Blinken paid homage to "World Press Freedom Day"; claimed that "the United States stands strongly with independent journalism"; explained that "the foundation of any democratic system" entails "holding leaders accountable" and "informing citizens"; and warned that "countries that deny freedom of the press are countries that don't have a lot of confidence in themselves or in their systems."

The rhetorical cherry on top of that cake came when he posed this question: "What is to be afraid of in informing the people and holding leaders accountable?" The Secretary of State then issued this vow: "Everywhere journalism and freedom of the press is challenged, we will stand with journalists and with that freedom." Since I know that I would be extremely skeptical if someone told me that those words had just come out Blinken's mouth, I present you here with the unedited one-minute-fifty-two-second video clip of him saying exactly this:

That the Biden administration is such a stalwart believer in the sanctity of independent journalism and is devoted to defending it wherever it is threatened would come as a great surprise to many, many people. Among them would be Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks and the person responsible for [breaking more major stories](#) about the [actions of top U.S. officials](#) than virtually all U.S. journalists employed in the corporate press combined.

Currently, Assange is sitting in a cell in the British high-security Belmarsh prison because the Biden administration is not only trying to extradite him to stand trial on espionage charges for having published documents embarrassing to the U.S. Government and the Democratic Party but also has appealed a British judge's January [ruling rejecting](#) that extradition request. The Biden administration is doing all of this, [noted](#) *The New York Times*, despite the fact that "human rights and civil liberties groups had asked the [administration]

to abandon the effort to prosecute Mr. Assange, arguing that the case . . . could establish a precedent [posing a grave threat to press freedoms](#)” — *press freedoms*, exactly the value which Blinken just righteously spent the week celebrating and vowing to uphold.

It was the Trump DOJ which brought those charges against Assange after then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo [claimed](#) in a 2017 speech that WikiLeaks has long “pretended that America’s First Amendment freedoms shield them from justice,” and then warned: “they may have believed that, but they are wrong.” Pompeo added — invoking the mentality of all states that persecute and imprison those who report effectively on them — that “to give [WikiLeaks] the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. *It ends now.*”

But like so many other Trump policies concerning press freedoms — from [defending](#) the Trump DOJ’s use of warrants to obtain journalists’ telephone records, to [demanding](#) Edward Snowden be kept in exile, to keeping Reality Winner and Daniel Hale imprisoned — top Biden officials have long been fully on board with Assange’s persecution. Indeed, they have been at the forefront of the effort to destroy basic press freedoms not just for WikiLeaks but journalists generally.

It was Joe Biden who [called](#) Assange a “high-tech terrorist” in 2010. It was the Obama administration that [convened](#) a years-long grand jury to try to prosecute Assange. It was Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) who [urged](#) Assange’s prosecution under the Espionage Act years before Trump was in office. And it was Blinken’s colleague on the Obama national security team, Hillary Clinton, who [praised](#) the DOJ for its prosecution of Assange. All of this was intended as punishment for Assange’s revelations of [rampant wrongdoing](#) by the U.S. Government and its allies and adversary governments around the world.

The New York Times

Biden Justice Dept. Asks British Court to Approve Extradition of Julian Assange

Advocates of press freedoms had urged the new administration to instead drop a Trump-era effort to prosecute the WikiLeaks founder.



The New York Times, Feb. 21, 2021

How can you run around the world feigning anger over *other countries'* persecution of independent journalists when you are a key part of the administration that is doing more than anyone to destroy one of the most consequential independent journalists of the last several decades? Indeed, as numerous journalists warned at the time, there were few, if any, administrations in U.S. history more hostile to basic press freedoms than the Obama administration in which Blinken previously served, [including prosecuting](#) double the number of journalistic sources under espionage laws than *all previous administrations combined*.

In 2013, while Blinken was serving as a high-level official in the State Department, the Committee to Protect Journalists did something very rare — issued [a report warning](#) of an epidemic of press freedom attacks *by the U.S. Government* — and said: “In the Obama administration’s Washington, government officials are increasingly afraid to talk to the press.” *The New Yorker’s* Jane Mayer [said](#) of the Obama administration’s press freedom attacks: “It’s a huge impediment to reporting, and so chilling isn’t quite strong enough, it’s more like freezing the whole process into a standstill.” James Goodale, the *New York Times’* General Counsel during the paper’s battle in the 1970s to publish the Pentagon Papers, [warned](#) that “President Obama will surely pass President Richard Nixon as the worst president ever on issues of national security and press freedom.”

Even the specific “press freedom attack” Blinken referenced in that video interview — namely, Russia’s recent [demand](#) that media outlets linked to foreign governments such as Radio Free Europe register as “foreign agents” with the Russian government and pay fines for their failure to do so — is one which Blinken and his comrades have wielded against others for years. Indeed, Russia was responding to the U.S. Government’s [previous demand](#) that RT and other Russian news agencies register as “foreign agents” in the U.S., as well as the Biden administration’s [escalated attacks](#) just last month on news agencies it claims serves as propaganda agents for the Kremlin.

It is hardly new for the U.S. to dole out lectures which the rest of the world recognizes as complete farces. In 2015, then-President Obama was prancing around India giving lectures on the importance of human rights, only to [cut short his trip](#) to fly to Saudi Arabia, where he met numerous top officials of the U.S. Government to pay homage to Saudi King Abdullah, their long-time close and highly repressive ally whose totalitarian regime Obama did [so much](#) to [fortify](#).

But galavanting around the world masquerading as the champion of press freedoms and the rights of independent journalists, all while working to extend the confinement and detention of one of the people responsible for much of the most important journalistic revelations of this generation beyond the decade he has already endured, is a whole new level of deceit. “Hypocrisy” is insufficient to capture the craven insincerity behind Blinken’s posturing.

It is always easy — and cheap — to condemn the human rights abuses of your enemies. It is much harder — and more meaningful — to uphold those principles for your own dissidents. Blinken, like so many who preceded him in that Foggy Bottom office, theatrically excels at the former while failing miserably at the latter.

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Featured image: Tony Blinken At His Confirmation Hearing, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jan. 19, 2021. Screenshot via Mondoweiss

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