

# Civil Liberty Vanishes. Free Assange. Suppressing Legitimate Dissent

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

*The sinister potential of coronavirus lockdown to suppress dissent was on display on Monday as police broke up a small group of protestors outside Westminster Crown Court during a case management hearing for Julian Assange. The dozen protestors, who included Julian's father John Shipton, were all social distancing at least 2 metres apart (except where living in the same household). The police did not observe social distancing as they broke up this small and peaceful protest.*

This is a stark illustration of the use of the current emergency powers to suppress legitimate dissent.

For the first time, there was something of a court victory for Assange's defence team, as they obtained their preferred date of September for resumption of the extradition hearing. Last week magistrate Baraitser had tried to impose a choice of July or November based on the availability of Woolwich Crown Court. As defence witnesses have to come from around the world, July was too early for the defence, while November would mean another lengthy period of incarceration for the unconvicted Assange. This is not the first time the defence have secured the agreement of the US-led prosecution to a procedural request, but it is the very first time Baraitser has acceded to anything proposed by the defence, throughout all the lengthy proceedings.

SO the Assange hearing will resume in September, and of course I intend to be there to report it, if not [myself incarcerated](#). The exact date is not yet known nor the venue. It will not be Woolwich but another Crown Court which has availability. I suspect it may be at Kingston-upon-Thames, because the government will want to maintain the theatre of the peaceful Julian being an ultra-dangerous offender and that is the other purpose built "anti-terrorism court" in London.

It is well worth reading this [excellent article](#) from El Pais by Julian's partner, Stella Morris. It says a great deal that in the state that is actually holding Europe's most prominent political prisoner, no newspaper would publish it. It is a truism that the general public fail to notice the slide into authoritarianism before it is too late. I confess I never thought to witness the process first hand in the UK. The information on guns in the article is new to me:

After Julian was arrested a year ago, Spain's High Court opened an investigation into the security company that had been operating inside the embassy. Several whistleblowers came forward and have informed law enforcement of unlawful activities against Julian and his lawyers, both inside and outside the embassy. They are cooperating with law enforcement and

have provided investigators with large amounts of data.

The investigation has revealed that the company had been moonlighting for a US company closely associated with the current US administration and US intelligence agencies and that the increasingly disturbing instructions, such as following my mother or the baby DNA directive, had come from their US client, not Ecuador. Around the same time that I had been approached about the targeting of our baby, the company was thrashing out even more sinister plans concerning Julian's life. Their alleged plots to poison or abduct Julian have been raised in UK extradition proceedings. A police raid at the security company director's home turned up two handguns with their serial numbers filed off.

We are now to be expected to entrust ourselves to a new coronavirus tracing app, currently being trialed on the Isle of Wight, that allows the government to know precisely where we are and with whom. The results will be [permanently stored](#) in a central database – something that is not required for the ostensible purpose of the app. The UK is alone among European states in seeking to create a [national centralised database](#) containing traceable unique identifiers for individuals. Precisely to address civil liberties concerns, all other countries are using a devolved database approach with amalgamation only of research useful data which cannot identify individuals. The UK is also refusing to share code with the public, or even precise detail of developers. The US firm Palantir, which has developed the app for NHSX, is coy about where its development is carried out and by whom. So far nothing has been released on the architecture of the App.

I highly recommend [this podcast](#) by Matrix Chambers on the very alarming civil liberties implication of the approach to the tracing app by Boris Johnson's government.

There is no organisation or group with an interest in data privacy which is not sounding the alarm. [The Register reports](#):

Controversially, the NHSX app will beam that contact data back to government-controlled servers. The academics who signed today's open letter fear that this data stockpile will become "a tool that enables data collection on the population, or on targeted sections of society, for surveillance."

As we reported yesterday, Britain has abandoned the international consensus on how much data should be collected to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The letter said:

We hold that the usual data protection principles should apply: collect the minimum data necessary to achieve the objective of the application. We hold it is vital that if you are to build the necessary trust in the application the level of data being collected is justified publicly by the public health teams demonstrating why this is truly necessary rather than simply the easiest way, or a "nice to have", given the dangers involved and invasive nature of the technology.

Then a [further report in The Register](#) emphasised still more the UK government's rejection of the Apple-Google app being used by virtually every other country, which is specifically devised to make impossible centralised storing of information which identifies individuals:

Presumably the goal with this kind of explanation is to comfort the vast

majority of UK folk who don't understand how the entire internet economy works by connecting vast databases together.

So long as you can rely on one piece of per-user data – like a “big random number” – everything else can be connected. And if you also have a postcode, that becomes 100 times easier. Ever heard of Facebook? It's worth billions solely because it is able to connect the dots between datasets.

Indeed, it may be possible to work out who is associating with whom from the app's ID numbers. Bear in mind, the Apple-Google decentralized approach produces new ID numbers for each user each day, thwarting identification, especially with the ban on location tracking.

Levy also glossed over the fact that as soon as someone agrees to share their information with UK government – by claiming to feel unwell and hitting a big green button – 28 days of data from the app is given to a central server from where it can never be recovered. That data, featuring all the unique IDs you've encountered in that period and when and how far apart you were, becomes the property of NCSC – as its chief exec Matthew Gould was forced to admit to MPs on Monday. Gould also admitted that the data will not be deleted, UK citizens will not have the right to demand it is deleted, and it can or will be used for “research” in future.

Yes, that is Matthew Gould in charge of the whole project. Matthew Gould, who as Private Secretary to first David Miliband and then William Hague, and then as UK Ambassador to Israel, held an extraordinary total of eight secret meetings with Liam Fox and Adam Werritty together.

- 1) 8 September 2009 as Miliband's Principal Private Secretary (omitted from O'Donnell report)
- 2) 16 June 2010 as Hague's Principal Private Secretary (omitted from O'Donnell report)
- 3) A “social occasion” in summer 2010 as Ambassador designate to Israel with Gould, Fox and Werritty (omitted from O'Donnell report)
- 4) 1 September 2010 in London (only one September meeting in O'Donnell report)
- 5) 27 September 2010 in London (only one September meeting in O'Donnell report)
- 6) 4-6 February 2011 Herzilya Conference Israel (omitted from O'Donnell report)
- 7) 6 February 2011 Tel Aviv dinner with Mossad and Israeli military
- 8) 15 May 2011 “We believe in Israel” conference London (omitted from O'Donnell report)

Funnily enough, I was recalling Matthew Gould last week when the Cabinet Secretary, after his “investigation”, published his report “exonerating” Priti Patel of bullying. It reminded me of when then Gus O'Donnell as Cabinet Secretary published his “investigation” into the Fox-Werritty affair, in which Gus O'Donnell systematically lied and covered up the meetings between Fox, Werritty and Matthew Gould, claiming there had only been two such meetings when in fact there were eight. It is also a good moment perhaps to pay tribute to the redoubtable Paul Flynn MP, recently deceased, who after I briefed him attempted [to question](#) Gus O'Donnell on the Public Administration Committee about the meetings he was covering up. With admirable persistence, despite continual efforts to block him, Flynn did manage to get Gus O'Donnell to admit directly that one of the Fox/Werritty/Matthew Gould meetings was with Mossad.

Q<369> Paul Flynn: Okay. Matthew Gould has been the subject of a very serious complaint from two of my constituents, Pippa Bartolotti and Joyce Giblin. When they were briefly imprisoned in Israel, they met the ambassador, and they strongly believe—it is nothing to do with this case at all—that he was serving the interest of the Israeli Government, and not the interests of two British citizens. This has been the subject of correspondence.

In your report, you suggest that there were two meetings between the ambassador and Werritty and Liam Fox. Questions and letters have proved that, in fact, six such meetings took place. There are a number of issues around this. I do not normally fall for conspiracy theories, but the ambassador has proclaimed himself to be a Zionist and he has previously served in Iran, in the service. Werritty is a self-proclaimed—

Robert Halfon: Point of order, Chairman. What is the point of this?

Paul Flynn: Let me get to it. Werritty is a self-proclaimed expert on Iran.

Chair: I have to take a point of order.

Robert Halfon: Mr Flynn is implying that the British ambassador to Israel is working for a foreign power, which is out of order.

Paul Flynn: I quote the Daily Mail: “Mr Werritty is a self-proclaimed expert on Iran and has made several visits. He has also met senior Israeli officials, leading to accusations”—not from me, from the Daily Mail—“that he was close to the country’s secret service, Mossad.” There may be nothing in that, but that appeared in a national newspaper.

Chair: I am going to rule on a point of order. Mr Flynn has made it clear that there may be nothing in these allegations, but it is important to have put it on the record. Be careful how you phrase questions.

Paul Flynn: Indeed. The two worst decisions taken by Parliament in my 25 years were the invasion of Iraq—joining Bush’s war in Iraq—and the invasion of Helmand province. We know now that there were things going on in the background while that built up to these mistakes. The charge in this case is that Werritty was the servant of neo-con people in America, who take an aggressive view on Iran. They want to foment a war in Iran in the same way as in the early years, there was another—

Chair: Order. I must ask you to move to a question that is relevant to the inquiry.

Q<370> Paul Flynn: Okay. The question is, are you satisfied that you missed out on the extra four meetings that took place, and does this not mean that those meetings should have been investigated because of the nature of Mr Werritty’s interests?

Sir Gus O’Donnell: I think if you look at some of those meetings, some people are referring to meetings that took place before the election.

Q<371> Paul Flynn: Indeed, which is even more worrying.

Sir Gus O’Donnell: I am afraid they were not the subject—what members of the Opposition do is not something that the Cabinet Secretary should look into. It is not relevant.

But these meetings were held—  
Chair: Mr Flynn, would you let him answer please?

Sir Gus O'Donnell: I really do not think that was within my context, because they were not Ministers of the Government and what they were up to was not something I should get into at all.

Chair: Final question, Mr Flynn.

Q<372> Paul Flynn: No, it is not a final question. I am not going to be silenced by you, Chairman; I have important things to raise. I have stayed silent throughout this meeting so far.

You state in the report—on the meeting held between Gould, Fox and Werritty, on 6 February, in Tel Aviv—that there was a general discussion of international affairs over a private dinner with senior Israelis. The UK ambassador was present...

Sir Gus O'Donnell: The important point here was that, when the Secretary of State had that meeting, he had an official with him—namely, in this case, the ambassador. That is very important, and I should stress that I would expect our ambassador in Israel to have contact with Mossad. That will be part of his job. It is totally natural, and I do not think that you should infer anything from that about the individual's biases.

When I put in Freedom of Information requests for the minutes of the eight meetings involving all of Liam Fox, Adam Werritty and Matthew Gould, they came back as blank sheets of paper, with literally everything removed but the date, in the interests of “national security”. When I put in a Freedom of Information request for all correspondence between Adam Werritty and Matthew Gould, I received a refusal on the grounds it would be too expensive to collect it.

I should make my position perfectly plain. I think a coronavirus tracing app is an important tool in containing the virus. I would happily use the safeguarded one being developed by Google/Apple with decentralised data and daily changing identifiers, not linked to postcodes, being adopted by major European governments.

But I think serious questions have to be asked about why the UK government has developed its own unique app, universally criticised for its permanent central data collection and ability to identify individuals from their unique codes. That this is overseen not by a scientist or health professional, but by the man who held all those secret meetings with Fox and Werritty, including with Mossad as admitted to Parliament by the then Cabinet Secretary, frankly stinks.

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