

Could Julian Assange be Released in Two Months?

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As the new year began, ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons stated during a broadcast segment that he expected WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange would be released "within the next two months or so."

"I know [Australia Prime Minister] Anthony Albanese. He's working strongly behind the scenes," Lyons added. "He has said as much, but enough is enough."

Lyons is sympathetic to Assange's plight, making him one of the few correspondents in the world working for establishment news media who is willing to endorse calls to end the United States case against him.

But the key question is whether Lyons knows about some shift in the so-called "quiet diplomacy" between the US and Australia that may result in Assange being released from Belmarsh prison and returned home to Australia.

It does not appear that Lyons possesses any knowledge of any development that has yet to be publicly reported in more concrete detail.

"My expectation is in the next two months or so, Julian [#Assange](#) will be released."

Hear, hear! ABC Global Affairs Editor John Lyons on [@abcnews_au](#). John talks about Julian's declining health and his optimism for Albanese action. [#Albanese](#) [#Biden](#) [#USA](#) pic.twitter.com/zPWd1tz7wQ

— Ithaka the Movie (@IthakaMovie) [January 1, 2023](#)

In the clip of Lyons that was shared widely, he does not elaborate on how Albanese is "working strongly behind the scenes."

Albanese is the leader of the Australian Labor Party, and previous [reporting](#) in July 2022 by Kellie Tranter for Declassified Australia featured documents obtained from the Australian Attorney General's office that showed the Labor Party had not ruled out Assange's extradition from the United Kingdom to the US.

Talking points in the documents indicated that the Labor Party was prepared for a prisoner transfer of Assange. A prisoner transfer could only happen if Assange pled guilty to one or all of the offenses or if he was put on trial and sentenced in a US courtroom.

"The Assange case is unique. One of the ways in which that is the case is the attempted extraterritorial use of the US Espionage Act," Greg Barns SC, adviser to the Australian Assange Campaign, told Declassified Australia. "The US is seeking to establish a precedent where it could seek to extradite any journalist anywhere in the world for disclosure of US information.

"If Australia were to sanction a 'deal' whereby Assange pleaded guilty to a charge in exchange for an Australian served sentence, it would be endorsing that approach," Barns added.

Assange also knows that if he pleads guilty he would be helping the US government establish a precedent that could be used against journalists like him in the future. That makes a guilty plea unlikely.

Tranter, an attorney, researcher, and human rights advocate, concluded, "The imprecise language of the Labor government statements on using 'quiet diplomacy' to 'bring the matter to a close,' rather than clearly saying what they are seeking, may be giving false hope to the Australian public. Without putting forward its 'quiet diplomacy' in non-negotiable terms to the US, it may be that the dropping of charges will not even be considered."

Given that, Lyons' remarks give us no reason to believe that the limbo in Assange's case will end soon.

Lyons suggests the compelling thing about the Assange case is that Chelsea Manning, the "military officer who leaked the information," is "free." She was "pardoned by her own government."

That is not exactly true, and in fact, it is also misleading. Manning had her sentence commuted by President Barack Obama because she was dealing with severe mental health problems and had even attempted suicide at Fort Leavenworth prison in Kansas. Obama accepted that Manning had served enough of a sentence, since she had been in confinement for over six and a half years.

However, Obama did not pardon her. He did not recognize that what she had done when releasing documents to WikiLeaks amounted to whistleblowing on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that was crucial to fueling important debates on counterinsurgency warfare and open-ended military occupations to fight terrorism.

Prosecutors at the US Justice Department would probably say of Manning that unlike Assange she did her time and was found guilty. The reason they are still pursuing Assange is because he has "evaded justice" and "must be held accountable."

There is no evidence that officials in the Justice Department have changed their attitude. One unnamed official [told](#) longtime US national security journalist Eric Lichtblau in December 2022 that US Attorney General Merrick Garland “has made clear that he will follow the law wherever it leads.”

Lyons refers to Assange’s deteriorating health, saying that Assange’s brother Gabriel Shipton mentioned to him that Assange had a mini-stroke in Belmarsh last year. He also mentions the lockdown conditions that Assange had to endure in detention during early stages of the COVID pandemic.

None of these details consist of new information on Assange’s health. For the most part, Stella Assange, Assange’s family, or Assange’s legal team have not shared any specifics on his condition since the health scare in 2021.

It may be logical to presume that Julian Assange’s condition has worsened, but we do not know that he is any closer to death than he has been since his arrest in 2019.

“It’s been eight or nine years now of limbo,” Lyons states. “I think that it only takes one phone call from Anthony Albanese to Joe Biden, or at the end of a phone call, to say, listen, this is fine. Joe Biden would barely know the name Julian Assange. Of all the issues he’s got to deal with, Julian Assange is way down there.”

“Just to say, listen, we’re a great ally. We’re doing all this. Please, you’ve had this Australian citizen now waiting for justice for years and years and years. Whether he’s a journalist or not, I think any Australian citizen should be given due process, and he has not been given due process.”

The problem for Assange, however, is Biden *does* know his name.

Biden was vice president in the Obama administration and remembers the government had to respond to the WikiLeaks publications in 2010 and 2011. He also called Assange a “high-tech terrorist” when he [appeared](#) on NBC’s “Meet the Press” in 2010, and in 2019, when Biden was running for president, the Times [asked](#) him about the Espionage Act charges against Assange.

The US government under Biden does not believe Assange has been “denied due process.” That much is evident in their “assurances” to the UK government about how they would treat him.

Overall, what Lyons said is primarily advocacy, with no real news. It may not even be advocacy that benefits Assange because what Lyons said leads one to believe the Albanese administration is doing all that it can to have Assange freed from prison. Except we have no evidence that anything changed in 2022 to make this a reasonable expectation.

Yet let’s pretend for a moment that there is a small chance that what Lyons expects will come to fruition. Think of what it would signal to the world if a phone call from Albanese played an instrumental role in ending the case.

It would demonstrate that Assange was always one phone call away from freedom but remained in detention because the Australian government for several years refused to stand up and tell the US government that they had no right to put him on trial for engaging in journalism.

For the US government, it would be even worse. Dropping the case after a call would demonstrate that Assange was only prosecuted because he was an easy target for vindictive US officials. And after resistance to targeting him developed among the leadership of an allied country, officials could live with abandoning the case since “bringing him to justice” in a trial was never the main objective.

The objective was neutralizing Assange, and they succeeded in doing that years ago.

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