

Free Julian Assange, or You're Next

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Sources close to the Ecuadorean embassy have been predicting Julian Assange's expulsion from his safe-haven-turned-prison-cell for a few weeks now. Ecuadorean President Lenin Moreno seems to be fumbling to find a way to rescind the citizenship his predecessor granted the fugitive journalist without looking like a spineless tool of the American empire, declaring yesterday that Assange must "stop intervening in politics and self-determination of the country" else "[measures will be taken](#)." Trapped for more than six years in the embassy, where his plea for asylum has mutated into an open-ended prison sentence, Assange has been blocked from communicating with the outside world for the past 135 days, rendering Moreno's threats absurd. Held in indefinite seclusion and faced with imminent extradition to a country where he could face the death penalty, Assange has been all but forgotten by the media WikiLeaks empowered, many of whom have allowed establishment propaganda or petty interpersonal squabbles to confuse their moral responsibility toward a fellow truth-teller ensnared in an Orwellian nightmare. As Moreno tries to make nice with the US, Assange is poised to lose his political asylum, a development which would throw him to the wolves of Washington, ready to tear him to pieces for the unspeakable crime of publishing the truth.

Assange's plight is indicative of a disturbing global shift away from freedom of the press, towards an oppressive climate marked by McCarthyite attacks on alternative media as enemy propaganda in a new Cold War, Left-cover censorship that uses the language of political correctness to bolster authoritarian ideologies, and controlled-opposition provocateurs infiltrating alternative media to falsely delineate the bounds of acceptable discourse. The campaign against dissident media voices has been operating at fever pitch since the 2016 US election revealed the control matrix of the ruling class was less than total, and social media censorship is rapidly engulfing anti-establishment voices on both sides of the political spectrum as the mainstream media clings desperately to relevance.

In February, UK courts upheld the bail-jumping charge that permits authorities to arrest Assange should he exit the embassy – jumping bail for rape charges that Swedish courts dropped over a year ago, charges based on accusations that were [coerced and then recanted](#), as the basis for a case that was never prosecuted against a defendant who was never questioned. "Kafkaesque" was coined to describe circumstances like these. Despite the establishment's record of using sex-crimes charges to discredit dissidents and the flimsy non-case against Assange, some enemies still opt to smear him with the "rapist" epithet. Others cling to the threadbare Russiagate narrative, which casts him as a Russian dupe or willing Russian agent for publishing leaked documents revealing the corruption at the center of the Democratic Party. Still others, grasping at straws, point to what they call his support

for Trump – despite his characterization of the 2016 election as a choice between [cholera and gonorrhea](#) – as proof he has gone full fascist, an ironic accusation to make against the victim of a fascist police state. What unites Assange’s enemies is their reliance on shooting the messenger, a propaganda technique that is the establishment’s last best defense against a message too powerful to suppress.

Wikileaks is much more than its founder – its power comes from the leakers, not from Assange’s own writing, or from some special knack he has for getting the story. If the US and UK governments do silence him – whether through extradition and imprisonment or an indefinite extension of the absurd legal limbo in which he is allowed internet access only if he does not “[speak about politics](#)” – WikiLeaks will continue to publish the world’s secrets. By setting up a decentralized, ultra-resilient platform for whistleblowers to share their secrets anonymously, he caused a seismic shift in the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors, and that shift cannot be reversed. The threat inherent in Assange as a free man lies not in what *has* been published, but in what can be, and how. As Facebook and Twitter tighten the screws of censorship – anti-war journalists [Peter Van Buren](#) and [Janice Kortkamp](#) have been booted off Twitter, and even 9/11 Truth proponent turned Trump lapdog Alex Jones [has been barred](#) from most popular platforms – visionary anti-establishment techno-savants like Assange will be central figures in the mass movement toward secure social media platforms when those platforms emerge, fueled by an understanding that strong ideals and technical expertise are both essential if techno-dissidents are to shift the paradigm away from Deep State control of the internet.

Government persecution of Assange is to be expected – WikiLeaks keeps the ruling class up at night worrying their misdeeds might be smeared across the morning’s headlines – but his lack of support among fellow journalists is reprehensible. Whatever flaws Assange the person may possess are far outweighed by the good WikiLeaks has done for the world. In the media sphere, there is no downside to more information being available, especially free of charge. The patchwork of baseless smears and personal insults that has enveloped Assange since his internet connection was severed is pathetic and speaks volumes more about his detractors, kicking a man when he’s down, than about him. Reports from visitors to the embassy suggest his physical and mental condition is deteriorating rapidly, reports met with derision from a vocal cadre of establishment lackeys calling themselves journalists on Twitter. But below even these sadistic pigs are the spineless appeasers who maintain their silence as Assange is smeared and deprived of his rights, cowards who sigh with relief every time the dogs of war sink their teeth into someone else. The radio silence that followed then-CIA chief Mike Pompeo’s condemnation of WikiLeaks as a “hostile non-state intelligence service” – an ominous term he invented to lay the groundwork for whatever clandestine indictments US courts are [cooking up](#) after WikiLeaks embarrassed the CIA by [releasing Vault 7](#) – reflected appalling cowardice on the part of the establishment wing of the Fourth Estate, which must have quivered with pleasure as the [chubby Rapture-botherer](#) compared WikiLeaks unfavorably to so-called “legitimate news organizations like the New York Times and the Washington Post.” Any journalist who falls for such naked divide-and-conquer rhetoric should hang up their laptop.

The Russia Excuse

Because of the outsize role it played in the 2016 US election, WikiLeaks found itself at the center of Russiagate, the only conspiracy theory considered acceptable in mainstream American society. A month after the election, anonymous Ukrainian website PropOrNot declared – on the front page of the Washington Post, no less – that over 200 popular anti-

establishment media outlets on both Left and Right were actually mouthpieces for Russian propaganda. PropOrNot begged the US government to investigate WikiLeaks and 200 of its fellows as traitors, accusations WaPo was forced to wrap in a disclaimer after several of those outlets threatened libel lawsuits. The witch hunt was on – anti-war, anti-capitalist, anti-Big Government, anti-police state views were all nefarious heads on the same Russian hydra. If you were on that list and you didn't work for the Russians, you were a useful idiot, being fed information by Russian operatives so smooth you had no idea they worked for the Kremlin. It became fashionable to smear one's opponent as a Russian bot when losing internet arguments, and Sky News [infamously dragged](#) a British retiree and a Syrian-Australian scientist onto an interview program to essentially take a live Turing test. The narrative was ludicrous, but found fertile ground in the imagination of traumatized Clinton voters, who'd been assured at every turn their victory was certain. Even two years on, in the absence of any concrete proof of Russian collusion, a devoted core of believers keep the [Russiagate faith](#), fanning the flames with a cultic fervor as the rest of Democratic voters despair of ever again [winning an election](#).

The Russiagaters aren't done with WikiLeaks. The Democratic National Committee, watching progressive voters jump ship in droves after leaked documents proved its primaries were rigged against Bernie Sanders, fell back on its shoot-the-messenger playbook, naming the Trump campaign, Russia, and WikiLeaks in a lawsuit that would be adorably delusional if not for its chilling implications for a free press. The suit claims that by publishing the stolen documents, Wikileaks stole the DNC's trade secrets – the same defense, incidentally, used by Scientology when it filed its own suit against WikiLeaks in the organization's early days. Were the argument to stand, it would silence journalists who seek to publish leaked documents even when the journalists did not steal those documents themselves – dealing a major blow to investigative reporting. Pulitzer-winning exposés like the Pentagon papers or the more recent Panama papers would be impossible to write without the leaked or stolen documents provided by whistleblowers, who commit the minor crime of theft to expose the monstrous crimes of governments and corporations. The lawsuit also implicates WikiLeaks in illegal “wiretapping” – since the “trade secrets” were transmitted over the internet, and WikiLeaks must have known they'd been obtained illegally – and ties itself in knots creatively interpreting RICO statutes. If all journalists publishing whistleblower reports could be hit with RICO suits, such reporting would take on a whole new level of peril. The icing on the cake is the copyright violation charge – the DNC's documents, after all, were copyrighted material, which WikiLeaks was not licensed to publish! The [lawsuit is absurd](#), but its content was never meant to be taken seriously as an indictment of the elusive Trump-Russia collusion. It was meant to shut WikiLeaks up – and to silence any investigative journalists who would follow in Assange's footsteps.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [called for Assange's release](#) in 2016 in a report that criticized excesses by both the Swedish and UK governments and refuted the notion that he is in the Ecuadorian embassy of his own free will, facing no threat of extradition to the United States. The group recommended both countries “ensure the right of free movement of Mr. Assange and accord him an enforceable right to compensation” as they are in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Sweden, which had never before been found to detain a person arbitrarily by the UN WGAD, dropped its seven-year “preliminary investigation” into the rape allegations last May – an investigation the UK government had bullied them into prolonging for four of those years, reminding Swedish authorities it was “[not just another extradition](#).” Assange has served over three times the maximum jail sentence for

bail-jumping in the UK, but Judge Emma Arbuthnot upheld the warrant for his arrest in February, dismissing his concerns about extradition and the increasingly dire state of his health. Former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa [denounced his successor's](#) indefinite blocking of Assange's visitors and internet access as "torture" and called Moreno a "[wolf in sheep's clothing](#)" for jettisoning his leftist campaign platform to serve the interests of US empire over those of his own country.

US Guts First Amendment

Right now, the most urgent danger Assange faces is US extradition. The Trump regime, having pulled an about-face from Candidate Trump's "love" of WikiLeaks, has made it a "priority" to arrest Assange, and a UK arrest would soon see him on a plane headed to face the same DC judge who locked up Chelsea Manning for life – a sentence that was only commuted, incidentally, because Assange told Barack Obama he'd turn himself in in exchange for a pardon for Manning. Obama couldn't quite bring himself to pardon Manning, and the commutation "compromise" gave Assange a loophole to avoid facing the hanging judges in the capital. John Pilger and the [Courage Foundation](#) are campaigning for Assange's safe release to Australia with a guarantee that he will not be extradited by the United States, even though the word of the US under Trump means less than ever (the regime's reneging on the Iran nuclear deal having nibbled away at what few shreds remained after the deadly bait-and-switches that disarmed and then disemboweled Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi). The idea of US extradition should be ludicrous, given that Assange has neither entered the US nor committed any crimes against it, but merely publishing stolen documents has increasingly been codified as a crime in the post-9/11 US.

The Obama administration prosecuted more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all previous presidents combined, part of a comprehensive attack on press freedom that saw legal protections for journalists and their [sources eviscerated](#). Not to be outdone, Trump AG Jeff Sessions announced last year that his Justice Department was pursuing three times as many leak investigations as Obama's and that they would be reviewing the department's press policies to make it easier to prosecute such leaks. When the Intercept and Freedom of the Press Foundation published Justice Department documents detailing the department's press policies, they glossed over the real story – that [press protections](#) don't apply to a journalist who is "believed to be a spy or...part of a news organization associated with a foreign intelligence service or otherwise acting on behalf of a foreign power." Another reason for casting WikiLeaks and other alternative media as Russian stooges becomes abundantly clear. Obama's Justice Department used the Espionage Act, a WWI-era law meant to prosecute spies, as a weapon in its war on whistleblowers; Trump's goons are just taking this strategy to its logical conclusion.

Controlled Opposition

One should expect obfuscation and misleading coverage from the Intercept, whose star journalist Glenn Greenwald has not yet released 95% of the [Snowden files](#) he was entrusted to curate in 2013. eBay billionaire Pierre Omidyar's platform, which rose to prominence because of its monopoly on the Snowden material, has always acted in Omidyar's interest first and [journalism's last](#). During Obama's presidency, Omidyar visited the White House more often than the CEOs of Google, Facebook, or Amazon, rendering invalid the notion of the Intercept as anti-establishment. In launching parent company First Look Media, Omidyar essentially paid \$250 million to acquire control of Greenwald and Laura Poitras, the two journalists in possession of the Snowden documents, and now owns

those documents, which allegedly include the juicy details of PayPal's business relationship with the NSA and its function within the agency's unconstitutional spying programs. Omidyar has made no secret of his [antipathy towards leakers](#), and he clearly does not intend to release any more of the Snowden material if it can be avoided.

With the anti-leak bias at the core of the Intercept exposed, it should shock no one that the outlet [was responsible](#) for last year's arrest of leaker Reality Winner. What appeared to be sloppy opsec may have been deliberate betrayal – the journalists who bungled Winner's leak were also involved in [outing CIA whistleblower](#) John Kiriakou, who exposed the agency's torture program. When the Intercept publishes factually inaccurate polemics against WikiLeaks, it is not an anomalous act by an otherwise pro-transparency media platform, but a blow against the authentic competitor it wants to replace with its own controlled opposition. Micah Lee, who has called the WikiLeaks founder a “rapist, liar, & [ally to fascists](#)” as well as a “Putin fanboy,” is a Russiagate true believer who convinced the Freedom of the Press Foundation to cut off Wikileaks' funding before penning the least fact-based smear yet to emerge from the Intercept. The irony is rich, considering that the FPF was formed to circumvent the banking blockade on donations to WikiLeaks in the fallout from the Cablegate leaks. But Omidyar now funds the FPF, whose ranks have swelled to 15 members, many of whom are affiliated with the Intercept. There, they take turns hammering at Assange with baseless smears and innuendos (most recently Xeni Jardin's attempts to link Assange to [Cambridge Analytica](#), as well as her deliberate mischaracterization of his Twitter DMs as [death threats](#)) in between shilling for terrorist movie stars the White Helmets and fanning the dying embers of Russiagate. Greenwald has much to answer for beyond merely dragging his feet in releasing Snowden's material, though he recently ventured a [lukewarm defense](#) of Assange as press-freedom poster-boy.

The Ukrainian Connection

Omidyar joined USAID and other CIA-backed NGOs in funding the 2014 Euromaidan revolution, which replaced democratically-elected Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich with a coalition of far-right neo-Nazi goons backed by the US State Department and led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk (later Petro Poroshenko). The Ukrainian government is known for targeting dissident journalists both inside and outside its borders, outsourcing such thought-policing to amateur “security researchers” via open-source surveillance tools to devastating effect. Within the government, it created the Orwellian-sounding Ministry of Information Policy in 2015, ostensibly to combat Russian propaganda by manufacturing its own, and designated all journalists who opposed the regime as “collaborators” – fair game for retaliation, be it harassment, arrest, or murder. Anonymous website Mirotvorets doxxed [thousands of “terrorists”](#) operating in the eastern separatist regions of Donetsk and Donbas – a list that grew to include over a thousand journalists whose only crime was receiving credentials from the contested regions – and encouraged patriotic Ukrainians to snitch on pro-Russian elements in their midst while threatening pro-Russian elements with death if they did not rat out their friends. Many journalists received death threats; some were attacked in the streets; some, like Pavel Sheremet, were killed. The attackers were not government goon squads, but propagandized Ukrainian civilians who believed they were doing their patriotic duty by attacking “traitors.”

As the US becomes more hostile to journalists, it's impossible to ignore the Ukrainian blueprint for the future. Demonizing/scapegoating of Russia? [check](#). Spinning of contested events? [check](#). Anonymous blacklist(s) of dissident journalists (PropOrNot, Mirotvorets)? [check](#). PropOrNot did not inspire ordinary American citizens to physically attack dissident

journalists, but by smearing them as traitors, it established a subconscious association that can be drawn upon or amplified in the future. European Values followed up on the slanders last year with an exhaustive list of 2000+ names of politicians and media figures who had appeared on RT, dismissing them all categorically as Kremlin operatives – names running the gamut from UKIP’s Nigel Farage to the Libertarian Party’s Gary Johnson to John Sununu, a relatively obscure figure from the first Bush administration. George Eliason described years ago how [Ukrainian intelligence](#) has outsourced the persecution of dissident journalists to civilians [in a series of terrifying articles](#) that read like a [dystopian nightmare](#) – vigilante citizens armed with NSA surveillance technology acting out their personal vendettas on law-abiding citizens who have no idea they’re being targeted – and he has documented extensively the role these [shadowy figures](#) played in the 2016 election. They did such a good job, in fact, that they’ve been rewarded with the highest prize a propagandist could ask for – the ability to determine truth and falsehood on the world’s largest social media platform. The [Atlantic Council](#), a pro-NATO think tank funded by Ukrainian billionaires, multinational banks, weapons contractors, and other supra-governmental entities, has joined Facebook’s fight against “fake news.” The truth has left the building.

Global Crackdown

The persecution of Assange is just one piece of a coordinated effort at press suppression that reaches around the globe. The Department of Homeland Security is currently compiling a master list of “[journalists and media influencers](#)” – people who have committed no crime other than publishing. The agency plans to track over 290,000 news sources globally, in over 100 languages that will be instantly translated to English. Browsable by “location, beat, and type of influencer,” the database will also have profiles of each “influencer” including their contact information, previous writings, and “sentiment.” Applications closed four months ago, so it’s presumably in development now. They *really* don’t want another WikiLeaks, or a proper alternative to Facebook/Twitter, or – worse – a Deep-State-free Google.

The DHS database facilitates the rise of a Mirotvorets for every country – a police state’s wet dream – as well as a valuable information trove to be sold to foreign governments frustrated with their own unruly press. There is no understating the potential abuses, especially at a time when (according to the latest [RSF report](#)) hostility toward journalists is on the rise worldwide. Egypt and Turkey are accusing journalists of terrorism and even imprisoning those who don’t display loyalty toward their governments; Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte has told reporters they “are not exempted from assassination;” Czech president Milos Zeman has called for journalists to be “liquidated” and recently brandished a prop AK47 labeled “journalists.” Serbian PM Aleksandar Vucic followed the examples of the US, UK and Ukraine, using state media to intimidate independent journalists and accusing them of “treachery” and being foreign spies. Countless regimes were called out by the [RSF report](#) for publicly insulting the press. Germany has used the specter of “fake news” to pass one of the most restrictive anti-free-speech laws in the EU, fining social networks if they don’t remove “hate speech” quickly enough after it’s reported. Given that country’s notoriously broad definition of “hate speech” – octogenarian “Nazi grandma” Ursula Haverbeck is serving a 14-month sentence for “holocaust denial” for calling Auschwitz a labor camp – German journalists are especially screwed.

The [#Unity4J campaign](#) is a nexus of activists from all corners of the ideological arena working together to uphold the cause of press freedom around the world. This is not just about Julian Assange, but about one of the fundamental rights of humankind. Freedom of

the press is crucial to maintaining government transparency – if there is one thing WikiLeaks has taught us, it is that governments are prone to the most evil acts when they believe no one is capable of holding them accountable. [Actions are being planned](#) around the world in the event that Assange is expelled from the embassy and extradited. If you can't [support his release](#), don't expect anyone to show up when they come for you, because they will not stop with imprisoning Assange, or Kiriakou, Manning, Winner, and the endless list of whistleblowers punished for the crimes they exposed. It doesn't matter if you think that Assange is a cad, or that he said something mean on Twitter, or that he went off the deep end during the 2016 election (you'd go off the deep end too if you had spent the last five years in legal limbo in a foreign embassy with only the occasional glimpse of sunlight to remind you what planet you're on, and one can hardly accuse him of supporting a candidate he likened to an STD). Assange committed no crime, yet he rots in solitary confinement. Such inhumane treatment of an individual who has done so much for the cause of transparency and truth is unconscionable. Safe passage must be arranged to a country where he will be safe from US extradition. Publishing the truth – forcing the powerful to answer for their crimes – should not be a capital offense.

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