

Wikileaks, the United States, Sweden, and Devil's Island

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December 16 ... I'm standing in the snow in front of the White House ... Standing with Veterans for Peace ... I'm only a veteran of standing in front of the White House; the first time was February 1965, handing out flyers against the war in Vietnam. I was working for the State Department at the time and my biggest fear was that someone from that noble institution would pass by and recognize me.

Five years later I was still protesting Vietnam, although long gone from the State Department. Then came Cambodia. And Laos. Soon, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Then Panama was the new great threat to America, to freedom and democracy and all things holy and decent, so it had to be bombed without mercy. Followed by the first war against the people of Iraq, and the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia. Then the land of Afghanistan had rained down upon it depleted uranium, napalm, phosphorous bombs, and other witches' brews and weapons of the chemical dust; then Iraq again. And I've skipped a few. I think I hold the record for most times picketing the White House by a right-handed batter.

And through it all, the good, hard-working, righteous people of America have believed mightily that their country always means well; some even believe to this day that we never started a war, certainly nothing deserving of the appellation "war of aggression".

On that same snowy day last month Julian Assange of Wikileaks was freed from prison in London and told reporters that he was more concerned that the United States might try to extradite him than he was about being extradited to Sweden, where he presumably faces "sexual" charges.¹

That's a fear many political and drug prisoners in various countries have expressed in recent years. The United States is the new Devil's Island of the Western world. From the mid-19th century to the mid-20th, political prisoners were shipped to that god-forsaken strip of French land off the eastern coast of South America. One of the current residents of the new Devil's Island is Bradley Manning, the former US intelligence analyst suspected of leaking diplomatic cables to Wikileaks. Manning has been imprisoned for seven months, first in Kuwait, then at a military base in Virginia, and faces virtual life in prison if found guilty, of something. Without being tried or convicted of anything, he is allowed only very minimal contact with the outside world; or with people, daylight, or news; among the things he is denied are a pillow, sheets, and exercise; his sleep is restricted and frequently interrupted. See Glenn Greenwald's discussion of how Manning's treatment constitutes torture. ²

A friend of the young soldier says that many people are reluctant to talk about Manning's deteriorating physical and mental condition because of government harassment, including

surveillance, seizure of their computer without a warrant, and even attempted bribes. “This has had such an intimidating effect that many are afraid to speak out on his behalf.” 3 A developer of the transparency software used by Wikileaks was detained for several hours last summer by federal agents at a Newark, New Jersey airport, where he was questioned about his connection to Wikileaks and Assange as well as his opinions about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. 4

This is but a tiny incident from the near-century buildup of the American police state, from the Red Scare of the 1920s to the McCarthyism of the 1950s to the crackdown against Central American protesters in the 1980s ... elevated by the War on Drugs ... now multiplied by the War on Terror. It’s not the worst police state in history; not even the worst police state in the world today; but nonetheless a police state, and certainly the most pervasive police state ever — a Washington Post study has just revealed that there are 4,058 separate federal, state and local “counterterrorism” organizations spread across the United States, each with its own responsibilities and jurisdictions. 5 The police of America, of many types, generally get what and who they want. If the United States gets its hands on Julian Assange, under any legal pretext, fear for him; it might be the end of his life as a free person; the actual facts of what he’s done or the actual wording of US laws will not matter; hell hath no fury like an empire scorned.

John Burns, chief foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, after interviewing Assange, stated: “He is profoundly of the conviction that the United States is a force for evil in the world, that it’s destructive of democracy.”6 Can anyone who believes that be entitled to a full measure of human rights on Devil’s Island?

The Wikileaks documents may not produce any world-changing revelations, but every day they are adding to the steady, gradual erosion of people’s belief in the US government’s good intentions, which is necessary to overcome a lifetime of indoctrination. Many more individuals over the years would have been standing in front of the White House if they had had access to the plethora of information that floods people today; which is not to say that we would have succeeded in stopping any of the wars; that’s a question of to what extent the United States is a democracy.

One further consequence of the release of the documents may be to put an end to the widespread belief that Sweden, or the Swedish government, is peaceful, progressive, neutral and independent. Stockholm’s behavior in this matter and others has been as American-poodle-like as London’s, as it lined itself up with an Assange-accuser who has been associated with right-wing anti-Castro Cubans, who are of course US-government-supported. This is the same Sweden that for some time in recent years was working with the CIA on its torture-rendition flights and has about 500 soldiers in Afghanistan. Sweden is the world’s largest per capita arms exporter, and for years has taken part in US/NATO military exercises, some within its own territory. The left should get themselves a new hero-nation. Try Cuba.

There’s also the old stereotype held by Americans of Scandinavians practicing a sophisticated and tolerant attitude toward sex, an image that was initiated, or enhanced, by the celebrated 1967 Swedish film *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, which had been banned for awhile in the United States. And now what do we have? Sweden sending Interpol on an international hunt for a man who apparently upset two women, perhaps for no more than sleeping with them both in the same week.

And while they're at it, American progressives should also lose their quaint belief that the BBC is somehow a liberal broadcaster. Americans are such suckers for British accents. The BBC's Today presenter, John Humphrys, asked Assange: "Are you a sexual predator?" Assange said the suggestion was "ridiculous", adding: "Of course not". Humphrys then asked Assange how many woman he had slept with. ⁷ Would even *Fox News* have descended to that level? I wish Assange had been raised in the streets of Brooklyn, as I was. He would then have known precisely how to reply to such a question: "You mean including your mother?"

Another group of people who should learn a lesson from all this are the knee-reflex conspiracists. Several of them have already written me snide letters informing me of my naiveté in not realizing that Israel is actually behind the release of the Wikileaks documents; which is why, they inform me, that nothing about Israel is mentioned. I had to inform them that I had already seen a few documents putting Israel in a bad light. I've since seen others, and Assange, in an interview with *Al Jazeera* on December 23, stated that only a meager number of files related to Israel had been published so far because the publications in the West that were given exclusive rights to publish the secret documents were reluctant to publish much sensitive information about Israel. (Imagine the flak Germany's *Der Spiegel* would get hit with.) "There are 3,700 files related to Israel and the source of 2,700 files is Israel," said Assange. "In the next six months we intend to publish more files." ⁸

Naturally, several other individuals have informed me that it's the CIA that is actually behind the document release.

The right to secrecy

Many of us are pretty tired of supporters of Israel labeling as "anti-Semitic" most any criticism of Israeli policies, which is virtually never an appropriate accusation. Consider the Webster Dictionary definition: "Anti-Semite. One who discriminates against or is hostile to or prejudiced against Jews." Notice that the state of Israel is not mentioned, or in any way implied.

Here's what real anti-Semitism looks like. Listen to former president Richard Nixon: "The Jews are just a very aggressive and abrasive and obnoxious personality. ... most of our Jewish friends ... they are all basically people who have a sense of inferiority and have got to compensate." This is from a tape of a conversation at the White House, February 13, 1973, recently released. ⁹ These tapes, and there are a large number of them, are the Wikileaks of an earlier age.

Yet, as the prominent conservative Michael Medved pointed out after the release of Nixon's remarks: "Ironically, though, no American did more to rescue the Jewish people when it counted most: after the 1973 Egyptian-Syrian surprise attack destroyed a third of Israel's air force and killed the American equivalent of 200,000 Israelis, Nixon overruled his own Pentagon and ordered immediate re-supply. To this day, Israelis feel gratitude for this decisiveness that enabled the Jewish state to turn the tide of war." ¹⁰ So, was Richard Nixon anti-Semitic? And should his remarks be kept secret?

In another of his recent interviews, Julian Assange was asked whether he thought that "a state has a right to have any secrets at all." He conceded that there are circumstances when institutions have such a need, "but that is not to say that all others must obey that

need. The media has an obligation to the public to get out information that the public needs to know.” 11

I would add that the American people — more than any other people — have a need to know what their government is up to around the world because their government engages in aggressive actions more than any other government, continuously bombing and sending young men and women to kill and die. Americans need to know what their psychopathic leaders are really saying to each other and to foreign leaders about all this shedding of blood. Any piece of such information might be used as a weapon to prevent yet another Washington War. Michael Moore has recently written:

We were taken to war in Iraq on a lie. Hundreds of thousands are now dead. Just imagine if the men who planned this war crime back in 2002 had had a Wikileaks to deal with. They might not have been able to pull it off. The only reason they thought they could get away with it was because they had a guaranteed cloak of secrecy. That guarantee has now been ripped from them, and I hope they are never able to operate in secret again.

And, dear comrades, let us not forget: Our glorious leaders spy on us all the time; no communication of ours, from phone call to email, is secret from them; nothing in our bank accounts or our bedrooms is guaranteed any kind of privacy if they wish to know about it. Recently, the FBI raided the midwest homes of a number of persons active in solidarity work with Palestinians, Colombians, and others. The agents spent many hours going through each shelf and drawer, carting away dozens of boxes of personal belongings. So what kind of privacy and secrecy should the State Department be entitled to?

Preparing for the propaganda onslaught

February 6 will mark the centenary of the birth of Ronald Reagan, president of the United States from 1981 to 1989. The conservatives have wasted no time in starting the show. On New Years Day a 55-foot long, 26-foot high float honoring Reagan was part of the annual Rose Parade in Pasadena, California. To help you cope with, hopefully even counter, the misinformation and the omissions that are going to swamp the media for the next few months, here is some basic information about the great man’s splendid achievements, first in foreign policy:

- Nicaragua

For eight terribly long years the people of Nicaragua were under attack by Ronald Reagan’s proxy army, the Contras. It was all-out war from Washington, aiming to destroy the progressive social and economic programs of the Sandinista government — burning down schools and medical clinics, mining harbors, bombing and strafing, raping and torturing. These Contras were the charming gentlemen Reagan called “freedom fighters” and the “moral equivalent of our founding fathers”.

- El Salvador

Salvador’s dissidents tried to work within the system. But with US support, the government made that impossible, using repeated electoral fraud and murdering

hundreds of protestors and strikers. When the dissidents took to the gun and civil war, the Carter administration and then even more so, the Reagan administration, responded with unlimited money, military aid, and training in support of the government and its death squads and torture, the latter with the help of CIA torture manuals. US military and CIA personnel played an active role on a continuous basis. The result was 75,000 civilian deaths; meaningful social change thwarted; a handful of the wealthy still owned the country; the poor remained as ever; dissidents still had to fear right-wing death squads; there was to be no profound social change in El Salvador while Ronnie sat in the White House with Nancy.

- Guatemala

In 1954, a CIA-organized coup overthrew the democratically-elected and progressive government of Jacobo Arbenz, initiating 40 years of military-government death squads, torture, disappearances, mass executions, and unimaginable cruelty, totaling more than 200,000 victims — indisputably one of the most inhumane chapters of the 20th century. For eight of those years the Reagan administration played a major role.

Perhaps the worst of the military dictators was General Efraín Ríos Montt, who carried out a near-holocaust against the indians and peasants, for which he was widely condemned in the world. In December 1982, Reagan went to visit the Guatemalan dictator. At a press conference of the two men, Ríos Montt was asked about the Guatemalan policy of scorched earth. He replied “We do not have a policy of scorched earth. We have a policy of scorched communists.” After the meeting, referring to the allegations of extensive human-rights abuses, Reagan declared that Ríos Montt was getting “a bad deal” from the media.

- Grenada

Reagan invaded this tiny country in October 1983, an invasion totally illegal and immoral, and surrounded by lies (such as “endangered” American medical students). The invasion put into power individuals more beholden to US foreign policy objectives.

- Afghanistan

After the Carter administration provoked a Soviet invasion, Reagan came to power to support the Islamic fundamentalists in their war to eject the Soviets and the secular government, which honored women’s rights. In the end, the United States and the fundamentalists “won”, women’s rights and the rest of Afghanistan lost. More than a million dead, three million disabled, five million refugees; in total about half the population. And many thousands of anti-American Islamic fundamentalists, trained and armed by the US, on the loose to terrorize the world, to this day.

“To watch the courageous Afghan freedom fighters battle modern arsenals with simple hand-held weapons is an inspiration to those who love freedom,” declared

Reagan. “Their courage teaches us a great lesson — that there are things in this world worth defending. To the Afghan people, I say on behalf of all Americans that we admire your heroism, your devotion to freedom, and your relentless struggle against your oppressors.” 12

- The Cold War

As to Reagan’s alleged role in ending the Cold War ... pure fiction. He prolonged it. Read the story in one of my books. 13

Some other examples of the remarkable amorality of Ronald Wilson Reagan and the feel-good heartlessness of his administration:

Reagan, in his famous 1964 speech, “A Time for Choosing”, which lifted him to national political status: “We were told four years ago that 17 million people went to bed hungry each night. Well, that was probably true. They were all on a diet.”

“Undermining health, safety and environmental regulation. Reagan decreed such rules must be subjected to regulatory impact analysis — corporate-biased cost-benefit analyses, carried out by the Office of Management and Budget. The result: countless positive regulations discarded or revised based on pseudo-scientific conclusions that the cost to corporations would be greater than the public benefit.”

“Kick-starting the era of structural adjustment. It was under Reagan administration influence that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank began widely imposing the policy package known as structural adjustment — featuring deregulation, privatization, emphasis on exports, cuts in social spending — that has plunged country after country in the developing world into economic destitution. The IMF chief at the time was honest about what was to come, saying in 1981 that, for low-income countries, ‘adjustment is particularly costly in human terms’.”

“Silence on the AIDS epidemic. Reagan didn’t mention AIDS publicly until 1987, by which point AIDS had killed 19,000 in the United States.”

– Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman 14

“Reagan’s election changed the political reality. His agenda was rolling back the welfare state, and his budgets included a wide range of cuts for social programs. He was also very strategic about the process. One of his first targets was Legal Aid. This program, which provides legal services for low-income people, was staffed largely by progressive lawyers, many of whom used it as a base to win precedent-setting legal disputes against the government. Reagan drastically cut back the program’s funding. He also explicitly prohibited the agency from taking on class-action suits against the government — law suits that had been used with considerable success to expand the rights of low- and moderate-income families.”

“The Reagan administration also made weakening the power of unions a top priority. The people he appointed to the National Labor Relations Board were qualitatively more pro-management than appointees by prior Democratic or Republican presidents. This allowed companies to ignore workers’ rights with impunity. Reagan also made the firing of strikers an acceptable business

practice when he fired striking air traffic controllers in 1981. Many large corporations quickly embraced the practice. ... The net effect of these policies was that union membership plummeted, going from nearly 20 percent of the private sector workforce in 1980 to just over 7 percent in 2006. ”

– Dean Baker [15](#)

Reaganomics: a tax policy based on a notion of incentives which says that “the rich aren’t working because they have too little money, while the poor aren’t working because they have too much.”

– John Kenneth Galbraith

“According to the nostrums of Reagan Age America, the current Chinese system — in equal measure capitalist and authoritarian — cannot actually exist. Capitalism spread democracy, we were told ad nauseam by a steady stream of conservative hacks, free-trade apologists, government officials and American companies doing business in China. Given enough Starbucks and McDonald’s, provided with sufficient consumer choice, China would surely become a democracy.”

– Harold Meyerson 16

Throughout the early and mid-1980s, the Reagan administration declared that the Russians were spraying toxic chemicals over Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan — the so-called “yellow rain” — and had caused more than ten thousand deaths by 1982 alone, (including, in Afghanistan, 3,042 deaths attributed to 47 separate incidents between the summer of 1979 and the summer of 1981, so precise was the information). President Reagan himself denounced the Soviet Union thusly more than 15 times in documents and speeches. The “yellow rain”, it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead. 17

Reagan’s long-drawn-out statements re: Contragate (the scandal involving the covert sale of weapons to Iran to enable Reaganites to continue financing the Contras in the war against the Nicaraguan government after the US Congress cut off funding for the Contras) can be summarized as follows:

- I didn’t know what was happening.
- If I did know, I didn’t know enough.
- If I knew enough, I didn’t know it in time.
- If I knew it in time, it wasn’t illegal.
- If it was illegal, the law didn’t apply to me.
- If the law applied to me, I didn’t know what was happening.

Notes

1. *Sunday Telegraph* (Australia), December 19, 2010 [↵](#)
2. *Salon.com*, December 15, 2010, "[The inhumane conditions of Bradley Manning's detention](#)". See also [his attorney's account of Manning's typical day](#); and *Washington Post*, December 16, 2010 [↵](#)
3. *The Guardian* (London), December 17, 2010 [↵](#)
4. *New York Times*, December 19, 2010 [↵](#)
5. *Washington Post*, December 20, 2010 [↵](#)
6. Diane Rehm show, *National Public Radio*, Dec. 9, 2010 [↵](#)
7. *The Guardian* (London), December 21, 2010 [↵](#)
8. *Information Clearing House*, December 23 2010, "[WikiLeaks to Release Israel Documents in Six Months](#)" [↵](#)
9. *Washington Post*, December 12, 2010 [↵](#)
10. From Medved's radio show, December 14, 2010; "[Nixon: The Anti-Semitic Savior of Israel](#)" [↵](#)
11. *Al Jazeera*, December 22 2010, [Frost Over the World: Julian Assange interview](#) [↵](#)
12. March 21, 1983, in the White House [↵](#)
13. "Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II", p.17-18. Also for the five countries listed above, see the respective chapters in this book. [↵](#)
14. June, 2004; Mokhiber is editor of *Corporate Crime Reporter*; Weissman, editor of the *Multinational Monitor*, both in Washington, D.C. [↵](#)
15. April, 2007; Baker is Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington, DC [↵](#)
16. *Washington Post* columnist, June 3, 2009 [↵](#)
17. "Killing Hope", p.349 [↵](#)

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William Blum is the author of:

- *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*
- *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*
- *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*
- *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*

Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at www.killinghope.org

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