

Watch Assange Vigil Day After his Arrest

Among the guests were Daniel Ellsberg, Daniel McAdams, George Smazuely, Margaret Kimberely, Peter B. Collins and Michel Collon. Hosted by Elizabeth Vos and Joe Lauria.

JOHN PILGER: Assange Arrest a Warning from History

Real journalism is being criminalized by thugs in plain sight, says John Pilger. Dissent has become an indulgence. And the British elite has abandoned its last imperial myth: that of fairness and justice.

By [John Pilger](#)



The glimpse of Julian Assange being dragged from the Ecuadorean embassy in London is an emblem of the times. Might against right. Muscle against the law. Indecency against courage. Six policemen manhandled a sick journalist, his eyes wincing against his first natural light in almost seven years.

That this outrage happened in the heart of London, in the land of Magna Carta, ought to shame and anger all who fear for “democratic” societies. Assange is a political refugee protected by international law, the recipient of asylum under a strict covenant to which Britain is a signatory. The United Nations made this clear in the legal ruling of its Working Party on Arbitrary Detention.

But to hell with that. Let the thugs go in. Directed by the quasi fascists in Trump’s Washington, in league with Ecuador’s Lenin Moreno, a Latin American Judas and liar seeking to disguise his rancid regime, the British elite abandoned its last imperial myth:

that of fairness and justice.

Imagine Tony Blair dragged from his multi-million pound Georgian home in Connaught Square, London, in handcuffs, for onward dispatch to the dock in The Hague. By the standard of Nuremberg, Blair's "paramount crime" is the deaths of a million Iraqis. Assange's crime is journalism: holding the rapacious to account, exposing their lies and empowering people all over the world with truth.

The shocking arrest of Assange carries a warning for all who, as Oscar Wilde wrote, "sow the seeds of discontent [without which] there would be no advance towards civilization." The warning is explicit towards journalists. What happened to the founder and editor of WikiLeaks can happen to you on a newspaper, you in a TV studio, you on radio, you running a podcast.

Assange's principal media tormentor, *The Guardian*, a collaborator with the secret state, displayed its nervousness this week with an editorial that scaled new weasel heights. *The Guardian* has exploited the work of Assange and WikiLeaks in what its previous editor called "the greatest scoop of the last 30 years." The paper creamed off WikiLeaks' revelations and claimed the accolades and riches that came with them.

With not a penny going to Julian Assange or to WikiLeaks, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, turned on their source, abused him and disclosed the secret password Assange had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing leaked US embassy cables.

Revealing Homicidal Colonial Wars

When Assange was still trapped in the Ecuadorian embassy, Harding joined police outside and gloated on his blog that "Scotland Yard may get the last laugh." *The Guardian* then published a series of falsehoods about Assange, not least a discredited claim that a group of Russians and Trump's man, Paul Manafort, had visited

Assange in the embassy. The meetings never happened; it was fake.

But the tone has now changed. "The Assange case is a morally tangled web," the paper opined. "He (Assange) believes in publishing things that should not be published ... But he has always shone a light on things that should never have been hidden."

These "things" are the truth about the homicidal way America conducts its colonial wars, the lies of the British Foreign Office in its denial of rights to vulnerable people, such as the Chagos Islanders, the exposé of Hillary Clinton as a backer and beneficiary of jihadism in the Middle East, the detailed description of American ambassadors of how the governments in Syria and Venezuela might be overthrown, and much more. It is all available on the WikiLeaks [site](#).

The Guardian is understandably nervous. Secret policemen have already visited the newspaper and demanded and got the ritual destruction of a hard drive. On this, the paper has form. In 1983, a Foreign Office clerk, Sarah Tisdall, leaked British Government documents showing when American cruise nuclear weapons would arrive in Europe. *The Guardian* was showered with praise.

When a court order demanded to know the source, instead of the editor going to prison on a fundamental principle of protecting a source, Tisdall was betrayed, prosecuted and served six months.

If Assange is extradited to America for publishing what *The Guardian* calls truthful "things," what is to stop the current editor, Katherine Viner, following him, or the previous editor, Alan Rusbridger, or the prolific propagandist Luke Harding?

What is to stop the editors of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, who also published morsels of the truth that originated with WikiLeaks, and the editor of *El Pais* in Spain, and *Der Spiegel* in Germany and *The Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia. The list is long.

David McCraw, lead lawyer of *The New York Times*, wrote: "I think the prosecution [of Assange] would be a very, very bad precedent for publishers ... from everything I know, he's sort of in a classic publisher's position and the law would have a very hard time distinguishing between *The New York Times* and WikiLeaks."

Even if journalists who published WikiLeaks' leaks are not summoned by an American grand jury, the intimidation of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning will be enough. Real journalism is being criminalized by thugs in plain sight. Dissent has become an indulgence.

In Australia, the current America-besotted government is prosecuting two whistle-blowers who revealed that Canberra's spooks bugged the cabinet meetings of the new government of East Timor for the express purpose of cheating the tiny, impoverished nation out of its proper share of the oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea. Their trial will be held in secret. The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, is infamous for his part in setting up concentration camps for refugees on the Pacific islands of Nauru and Manus, where children self harm and suicide. In 2014, Morrison proposed mass detention camps for 30,000 people.

Journalism: a Major Threat

Real journalism is the enemy of these disgraces. A decade ago, the Ministry of Defense in London produced a secret document which described the "principal threats" to public order as threefold: terrorists, Russian spies and investigative journalists. The latter was designated the major threat.

The document was duly leaked to WikiLeaks, which published it. "We had no choice," Assange told me. "It's very simple. People have a right to know and a right to question and challenge power. That's true democracy."

What if Assange and Manning and others in their wake – if there are others – are silenced and "the right to know and question and

challenge" is taken away?

In the 1970s, I met Leni Reifenstahl, close friend of Adolf Hitler, whose films helped cast the Nazi spell over Germany.

She told me that the message in her films, the propaganda, was dependent not on "orders from above" but on what she called the "submissive void" of the public.

"Did this submissive void include the liberal, educated bourgeoisie?" I asked her.

"Of course," she said, "especially the intelligentsia ... When people no longer ask serious questions, they are submissive and malleable. Anything can happen."

And did. The rest, she might have added, is history.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist and filmmaker based in London. Pilger's Web site is: www.johnpilger.com. In 2017, the British Library announced a John Pilger Archive of all his written and filmed work. The British Film Institute includes his 1979 film, "Year Zero: the Silent Death of Cambodia," among the 10 most important documentaries of the 20th century. Some of his previous contributions to Consortium News can be [found here](#).

Please honor the legacy of Bob Parry with a [donation to our Spring Fund Drive](#).

7 Years of Lies About Assange Won't Stop Now

One of the few towering figures of our time was reduced to nothing more than a sex pest and scruffy bail-skipper, writes Jonathan Cook.

By **Jonathan Cook**

Jonathan-Cook.net



For seven years, from the moment Julian Assange sought refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, they have been telling us we were wrong, that we were paranoid conspiracy theorists. We were told there was no real threat of Assange's extradition to the United States, that it was all in our fevered imaginations.

For seven years, we have had to listen to a chorus of journalists, politicians and "experts" telling us that Assange was nothing more than a fugitive from justice, and that the British and Swedish legal systems could be relied on to handle his case in full accordance with the law. Barely a "mainstream" voice was raised in his defense in all that time.

From the moment he sought asylum, Assange was cast as an outlaw. His work as the founder of *Wikileaks* – a digital platform that for the first time in history gave ordinary people a glimpse into the darkest recesses of the most secure vaults in the deepest of Deep States – was erased from the record.

Assange was reduced from one of the few towering figures of our time – a man who will have a central place in history books, if we as a species live long enough to write those books – to nothing more than a sex pest, and a scruffy bail-

skipper.

The political and media class crafted a narrative of half-truths about the sex charges Assange was under investigation for in Sweden. They overlooked the fact that Assange had been allowed to leave Sweden by the original investigator, who dropped the charges, only for them to be revived by another investigator with a well-documented political agenda.

They failed to mention that Assange was always willing to be questioned by Swedish prosecutors in London, as had occurred in dozens of other cases involving extradition proceedings to Sweden. It was almost as if Swedish officials did not want to test the evidence they claimed to have in their possession.

The media and political courtiers endlessly emphasized Assange's bail violation in the U.K., ignoring the fact that asylum seekers fleeing legal and political persecution don't usually honor bail conditions imposed by the very state authorities from which they are seeking asylum.

Ignoring Mounting Evidence

The political and media establishment ignored the mounting evidence of a secret grand jury in Virginia formulating charges against Assange, and ridiculed *Wikileaks'* concerns that the Swedish case might be cover for a more sinister attempt by the U.S. to extradite Assange and lock him away in a high-security prison, as had happened to whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

They belittled the 2016 verdict of a panel of United Nations

legal scholars that the U.K. was “arbitrarily detaining” Assange. The media were more interested in the welfare of his cat.

They ignored the fact that after Ecuador changed presidents – with the new one keen to win favor with Washington – Assange was placed under more and more severe forms of solitary confinement. He was denied access to visitors and basic means of communications, violating both his asylum status and his human rights, and threatening his mental and physical wellbeing.

Equally, they ignored the fact that Assange had been given diplomatic status by Ecuador, as well as Ecuadorean citizenship. Britain was obligated to allow him to leave the embassy, using his diplomatic immunity, to travel unhindered to Ecuador. No “mainstream” journalist or politician thought this significant either.

They turned a blind eye to the news that, after refusing to question Assange in the U.K., Swedish prosecutors had decided to quietly drop the case against him in 2015. Sweden had kept the decision under wraps for more than two years.

It was a freedom of information request by an ally of Assange, not a media outlet, that unearthed documents showing that Swedish investigators had, in fact, wanted to drop the case against Assange back in 2013. The UK, however, insisted that they carry on with the charade so that Assange could remain locked up. A British official emailed the Swedes: “Don’t you dare get cold feet!!!”

Documents Destroyed

Most of the other documents relating to these conversations were unavailable. They had been destroyed by the U.K.'s Crown Prosecution Service in violation of protocol. But no one in the political and media establishment cared, of course.

Similarly, they ignored the fact that Assange was forced to hole up for years in the embassy, under the most intense form of house arrest, even though he no longer had a case to answer in Sweden. They told us – apparently in all seriousness – that he had to be arrested for his bail infraction, something that would normally be dealt with by a fine.

And possibly most egregiously of all, most of the media refused to acknowledge that Assange was a journalist and publisher, even though by failing to do so they exposed themselves to the future use of the same draconian sanctions should they or their publications ever need to be silenced. They signed off on the right of the U.S. authorities to seize any foreign journalist, anywhere in the world, and lock him or her out of sight. They opened the door to a new, special form of rendition for journalists.

This was never about Sweden or bail violations, or even about the discredited Russia-gate narrative, as anyone who was paying the vaguest attention should have been able to work out. It was about the U.S. Deep State doing everything in its power to crush WikiLeaks and make an example of its founder.

It was about making sure there would never again be a leak like that of “Collateral Murder,” the military video

released by *Wikileaks* in 2007 that showed U.S. soldiers celebrating as they murdered Iraqi civilians. It was about making sure there would never again be a dump of U.S. diplomatic cables, like those released in 2010 that revealed the secret machinations of the U.S. empire to dominate the planet whatever the cost in human rights violations.

Now the pretense is over. The British police invaded the diplomatic territory of Ecuador – invited in by Ecuador after it tore up Assange’s asylum status – to smuggle him off to jail. Two vassal states cooperating to do the bidding of the U.S. empire. The arrest was not to help two women in Sweden or to enforce a minor bail infraction.

No, the British authorities were acting on an extradition warrant from the U.S. And the charges the U.S. authorities have concocted relate to Wikileaks’ earliest work exposing the U.S. military’s war crimes in Iraq – the stuff that we all once agreed was in the public interest, that British and U.S. media clamored to publish themselves.

Still the media and political class is turning a blind eye. Where is the outrage at the lies we have been served up for these past seven years? Where is the contrition at having been gulled for so long? Where is the fury at the most basic press freedom – the right to publish – being trashed to silence Assange? Where is the willingness finally to speak up in Assange’s defense?

It’s not there. There will be no indignation at the *BBC*, or the *Guardian*, or *CNN*. Just curious, impassive – even gently mocking – reporting of Assange’s fate.

And that is because these journalists, politicians and

experts never really believed anything they said. They knew all along that the U.S. wanted to silence Assange and to crush *Wikileaks*. They knew that all along and they didn't care. In fact, they happily conspired in paving the way for today's kidnapping of Assange.

They did so because they are not there to represent the truth, or to stand up for ordinary people, or to protect a free press, or even to enforce the rule of law. They don't care about any of that. They are there to protect their careers, and the system that rewards them with money and influence. They don't want an upstart like Assange kicking over their applecart.

Now they will spin us a whole new set of deceptions and distractions about Assange to keep us anaesthetized, to keep us from being incensed as our rights are whittled away, and to prevent us from realizing that Assange's rights and our own are indivisible. We stand or fall together.

Jonathan Cook is a freelance journalist based in Nazareth. He blogs at <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>.
