

# How Ecuador's President Gave Up Assange

Lenin Moreno was desperate to ingratiate his government with Washington and distract the public from his mounting scandals, writes the *Grayzone's* Denis Rogatyuk.

By **Denis Rogatyuk**

*Grayzone*



The images of six Metropolitan police officers dragging Julian Assange out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London have enraged citizens around the world. Many have warned that if he is extradited to the U.S. for trial on conspiracy charges – and possibly much more if federal prosecutors have their way – it will lead to the criminalization of many standard journalistic practices. These scenes were only possible thanks to the transformation of Ecuador's government under the watch of President Lenin Moreno.

Since at least December 2018, Moreno has been working towards expelling the *Wikileaks* publisher from the embassy. The Ecuadorian president's behavior represents a stunning reversal of the policies of his predecessor, Rafael Correa, the defiantly progressive leader who authorized Assange's asylum back in 2012, and who now lives in exile.

While Ecuador's Foreign Minister Jose Valencia blamed his government's expulsion of Assange on the Australian journalist's "rudeness," the sellout is clearly a byproduct of Moreno's right-leaning agenda.

Political instability has swept across Ecuador since

revelations of widespread corruption in Moreno's inner circle emerged. The scandal coincided with Moreno's turn towards neoliberal economic reforms, from implementing a massive IMF loan package to the gradual and total embrace and support for U.S. foreign policy in the region. In his bid to satisfy Washington and deflect from his own problems, Moreno was all too eager to sacrifice Assange.

## **INA Papers Scandal**

*WikiLeaks's* decision to re-publish the details of Moreno's use of off-shore bank accounts in Panama, titled "INA Papers" after the name of the shell corporation at the center of the scandal (INA Investment Corporation), appear to be the main cause for the president's decision to expel Assange from the embassy.

Ecuadorian Communications Minister Andrés Michelena went as far as claiming that the INA Papers were a conspiracy plot between Julian Assange, the former President Rafael Correa and the current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The INA Papers scandal has cast a long shadow on Moreno's regime and shattered its pledge to fight against institutional corruption. The scandal reveals that a close associate of Moreno, Xavier Macias, lobbied for the contract of the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric power plant (valued at \$2.8 billion) as well as the ZAMORA 3000 MW plant to be awarded Sinohydro, a Chinese state-owned construction company.

The financial trail from the Chinese corporation passed through bank accounts in Panama belonging to INA Investment Corporation – a shell company originally founded in Belize,

a notable tax haven, by Edwin Moreno Garcés, the brother of the current president. The most crucial pieces of evidence indicate that the INA Investment funds were used to purchase a large apartment in Alicante, Spain, and a number of luxury items for Moreno and his family in Geneva, during his time as a special envoy on disability rights for the United Nations.

As the pressure mounted on Moreno, the attorney general of Ecuador issued a statement on March 19th, indicating that it had commenced an investigation into the INA Papers scandal involving the president and his family. Next, on March 27<sup>th</sup>, the National Assembly of Ecuador approved a vote in favor of investigating Moreno's alleged off-shore bank dealings in Panama. According to Ecuador Inmediato, 153 public service officials, along with all members of the National Assembly, were also included in the initial public hearing scheduled for April 1<sup>st</sup>.

The corruption scandal came amid a number of other prominent crises disrupting both the Moreno administration and the Ecuadorian economy. The local and regional elections of March 24<sup>th</sup>, as well as the election to the Council of Citizens' Participation and Social Control (CPCCS) on March 24th, have been riddled with a series of controversies and irregularities with regards to vote counts and allegations of fraud, including the attempts to invalidate null votes, disqualify and smear the candidates endorsed by ex-President Rafael Correa. The stunning lack of transparency and legitimacy was highlighted by a report of the mission of electoral observers of the Organisation of American States.

In an unusual twist, the U.S. ambassador, Todd Chapman, was spotted visiting the headquarters of Ecuador's National Electoral Council during the March 24<sup>th</sup> elections and allegedly participated as an official electoral observer in the elections. This display of interference was widely condemned on social media as illegal under the current electoral rules, which forbid foreign powers from playing any active role in the electoral process. But in Moreno's Ecuador, it was a perfect symbol of the new status quo.

### **IMF Deal**

During the recent meeting of the executive board of the IMF, the financial body approved a loan package of \$4.2 billion to the government of Lenin Moreno for what it called a "more dynamic, sustainable, and inclusive economy for the benefit of all Ecuadorians." The agreement coincided with layoffs of over 10,000 public sector workers, in addition to the ongoing policy of slashing in public and social spending, a decrease in the minimum wage and the removal of secure work protections that marked the sharp neoliberal turn of the Ecuadorian government under Moreno.

The IMF deal coincided with the intensifying attempts by the Ecuadorian government to proceed with the expulsion of Julian Assange from its London embassy. His arrest therefore stands as a sign that Moreno is willing to give up any part of his country's sovereignty – political, diplomatic, or economic – to comply with the demands of international finance.

The same pattern has been seen in Moreno's increasing level of collaboration with the Trump administration and its

foreign policy in Latin America. From holding private meetings with former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort, to publicly hosting Vice President Mike Pence in the Ecuadorian presidential palace, to authorizing the opening of a new "Security Cooperation Office" in place of the old U.S. military base in Manta, Moreno's embrace of Trump's "Monroeist" policy towards Latin America has become all too apparent.

At the same time, Moreno has gone to great lengths to undo the progress of Latin American unity and integration initiated by his predecessor and other progressive leaders in the region.

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, Moreno announced that Ecuador would leave the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), founded in 2008 by leaders of South America's so-called pink tide: Nestor Kirchner of Argentina, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Lula Da Silva of Brazil. The project was inspired by the long-standing vision of Simon Bolivar who envisaged South America as a federation of republics. UNASUR was meant to consolidate the growing economic and political integration among the increasingly progressive governments across the region, ultimately emulating the current structure of the European Union.

Moreno complained in his press release that UNASUR has been compromised by the lack of participation of the right-leaning governments in the region, as well as what he called, "irresponsible actions of certain leaders that replicated the worst vices of socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

In a manner similar to Francisco Santander and the project

of Gran Colombia during the 1820s, Moreno has opted for a pro-U.S. foreign policy and commercial relations based on free trade and economic liberalization. He has also followed the path of other right-wing leaders in the region such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Argentina's Mauricio Macri in officially recognizing Juan Guaidó as the president of Venezuela. Moreno was even among the attendees of the founding summit of Prosur, a newly convened regional bloc of U.S.-aligned neoliberal governments.

Moreno's decision to silence Julian Assange and expel him enabled the president to gain the trust of the Trump administration while distracting the Ecuadorian public and international media from his mounting crises at home. From corrupt dealing in off-shore bank accounts, the fraudulent elections of March 24<sup>th</sup> and his mishandling of the Ecuadorian economy, Moreno is in a world of trouble.

This has not escaped the notice of Correa, Ecuador's former president. After having his page blocked on Facebook, Correa stated that "In his hatred, because Wikileaks published corruption of INA papers, Moreno wanted to destroy Assange's life. He probably did it, but he has also done a huge damage to the country. Who will trust in ECUADOR again?"

Overall, Ecuador has come to resemble the neoliberal regimes of the 1990s across the continent, with IMF-sanctioned austerity, increasingly unstable state institutions and an almost complete obedience to the U.S. foreign policy in the region becoming the new policy standard. Handing Assange over for possible extradition to the U.S. was the inevitable result of Moreno's turn to the right, but it is hardly the

end of his sell out.

**Denis Rogatyuk is a Russian-Australian freelance writer, journalist and researcher. His articles, interviews and analysis have been published in a variety of media sources around the world including *Jacobin*, *Le Vent Se Lève*, *Sputnik*, *Green Left Weekly*, *Links International Journal*, *Alborada* and others.**

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## Julian Assange's Nightmarish Future

The *WikiLeaks* publisher is in a maximum-security prison that has been called the UK's Guantanamo Bay, Elizabeth Vos reports.

By **Elizabeth Vos**

*Special to Consortium News*



**While Julian Assange waits for what comes next – sentencing on skipping bail in England and a U.S. extradition request – he is being held in a maximum-security prison in London that has been called the “UK's Guantanamo Bay” and has been used to detain alleged terrorists, sometimes indefinitely.**

The reputation of HM Prison Belmarsh raises natural concerns about the wellbeing of the *WikiLeaks* publisher there.

“While many prisoners at Belmarsh say it’s difficult to see a doctor or a nurse, these services are available at the facility,” reports *Bloomberg News*, regarding the possibility of Assange receiving overdue medical attention.

Her Majesty’s Prison Belmarsh had been used to detain high-profile national security prisoners indefinitely without charge under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act of 2001, passed six weeks after 9/11, until the House of Lords ruled it violated the British Human Rights Act.

Assange was found guilty on Thursday of skipping bail. On May 2 he is scheduled to participate in a court hearing via video link on the U.S. extradition request.

Assange’s name now tops the alphabetical roster of notables who have done time at Belmarsh or who are still there. The list includes notorious gangsters, serial killers and drug traffickers. Ronnie Biggs of the 1963 Great Train Robbery was imprisoned there. Others are subjects of high-profile scandal, such as Richard Tomlinson, imprisoned for six months in 1997 after he gave a synopsis of a proposed book detailing his career with MI6 to an Australian publisher. Andy Coulson, a former press secretary to Prime Minister David Cameron, was imprisoned for a few months for the phone hacking scandal that engulfed *News of the World* while he was editor there.

One mainstay of the inmate population are convicted terrorists. Abu Hamza al-Masri, an Egyptian cleric, was at Belmarsh until his extradition to the United States where he is serving life in prison on 11 counts of terrorism. Rams

Mohammed, Muktar Said Ibrahim and Yasin Hassan Omar were all incarcerated there for their roles in the 2005 attempted bombings of the London underground. Anjou Choudhry completed his sentence at Belmarsh for promoting the [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant](#). Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale are identified as Islamic terrorists convicted of the murder of British soldier [Lee Rigby in London](#).

There is legitimate concern about how Assange will fare inside Belmarsh. A 2018 survey by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons found that “91 percent of men said they had problems when they arrived at Belmarsh, which was higher than at other local prisons and more than at our last inspection,” [Business Insider](#) reported.

In 2009, the same prison authority had found “[extremely high](#)” amount of force used to control inmates at the prison.

Detainees were “unable to see the intelligence evidence against them and are confined to their cells for up to 22 hours a day. Their solicitors say they have been ‘entombed in concrete,’ [BBC](#) reported in 2004.

The 2018 chief inspector’s report said the prison contains a “High Security Unit (HSU) within the already-high-security premises, which the report described as a ‘prison within a prison.’” The report went on to state that:

“The role of the high security unit (HSU) remained unclear. We were told it was for high risk category A prisoners, but such men are held in main locations in other high security prisons and we did not understand why the approach was different at Belmarsh. We noted that two

of the men held were only standard risk category A prisoners and that in December 2017 two men from the main prison had been held in the HSU segregation unit. The conditions and the regime in the HSU provided prisoners with an intense custodial experience in which they could exercise little self-determination, and we were concerned that prisoners could be located there without any oversight process or redress.”

Describing the use of solitary confinement, the chief inspector’s report found: “Conditions in the unit were reasonable, but some prisoners could not have a shower or exercise every day. Those who could only be unlocked in the presence of several officers were most affected.” The report repeatedly described concerns that arose due to staff shortages, and added in a separate section: “We remained concerned about this use of designated cells, where men were held in prolonged solitary confinement on an impoverished regime.”

Individual accounts from former Belmarsh inmates published by CAGE, an advocacy group against human rights abuses that occurred as a result of the “war on Terror,” described their experiences. An anonymous prisoner who was later acquitted said: “The prison system is run in such a way as to humiliate and degrade the inmate as much as possible. The process of dehumanisation starts immediately.” In the wake of Assange’s imprisonment, CAGE published a statement, saying in part: “The UK is doing the U.S.’s dirty work by persecuting a man who exposed war crimes.”

Vigils and protests in support of Assange were held outside

the prison on April 14 and April 15.

The last time Assange was held in a British prison, in 2010, he says that he was given food containing metal objects that severely damaged a tooth. This was at London's HM Prison Wandsworth. The incident caused serious injury and he did not receive proper medical treatment during the six and a half years of his confinement in the Ecuadorian embassy. A medical report published by *WikiLeaks* in 2015 describes Assange's version of the event:

Mr. Assange reports that the broken tooth (UR4) was initially fractured when he was in the SCU at Wandsworth Prison in December 2010. Mr. Assange showed me contemporaneous Wandsworth prison reports regarding Mr. Assange's receiving the attention of a dentist after a hard object had broken his his upper first premolar (UR4). (Mr. Assange reports that the piece of fractured tooth disappeared from Mr. Assange's cell while he was in the showers; immediately after Mr. Assange complained to CSU staff about the object in his food). Mr. Assange says that the episode not only caused physical pain and distress, but also, in conjunction with the segregation, caused him to feel targeted and persecuted. A series of dental complications have resulted from the fracture.

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### **'This is Unlawful, I'm Not Leaving'**

Uniformed British police officers, aided by what appeared to be plain-clothes secret police, had entered the embassy on Thursday morning when the Ecuadorian ambassador "indicated he was preparing to serve upon Mr Assange documentation revoking his asylum," attorney James Hines, Queens Counsel, who represented the U.S. government, told the court during Assange's bail-skipping hearing. *The Guardian* quoted Hines as later telling the court that day:

"Officers tried to introduce themselves to him in order to execute the arrest warrant before he barged past them, attempting to return to his private room.

“He was eventually arrested at 10.15 am. He resisted that arrest, claiming ‘this is unlawful’ and he had to be restrained.

“Officers were struggling to handcuff him. They received assistance from other officers outside and he was handcuffed saying, ‘this is unlawful, I’m not leaving’.

“He was in fact lifted into the police van outside the embassy and taken to West End Central police station.”

Assange was likely referring to the 1951 Convention on Refugees that forbids a nation that has granted someone asylum from returning that person to a country where the asylee is likely to be persecuted.

Police were then filmed forcibly dragging the handcuffed, physically ill Assange from the steps of the embassy. During the arrest, Assange was seen holding a copy of Gore Vidal’s “The History of the National Security State,” as he shouted: “The UK must resist this...the UK must resist.”

## **Fears of U.S. Mistreatment**

In view of then CIA Director Mike Pompeo’s comparison of *WikiLeaks* (46:00 minutes into the above video) with Al Qaeda, while calling it a “non-state hostile intelligence service,” concerns are mounting in Assange’s camp about the harsh treatment he may face by British, and if he’s extradited, U.S. authorities.

In the hours following the arrest, Reuters reported: “Lawyers for Assange said he may risk torture and his life would be in danger if he were to be extradited to the United

States.”

On the same day, human-rights organizations and press-freedom advocates argued against the prosecution of the *WikiLeaks* founder. These groups included the [ACLU](#), The Freedom of the Press Foundation, the [Center for Investigative Journalism](#), Amnesty Ireland, [Committee To Protect Journalists](#), Reporters Without Borders, [Human Rights Watch](#), the Center for Constitutional Rights, the [National Union of Journalists](#), the [The Knight First Amendment Institute](#) and [Digital Rights Watch](#).

*The Intercept*'s [Glenn Greenwald](#) was quick to note the widespread mischaracterization of the charge against Assange as one of “hacking,” writing that the charging document and related materials indicate Assange may have attempted to help Chelsea Manning, a U.S. Army whistleblower then known as Bradley Manning, use a different username to access classified material she was legally allowed to access at the time. In other words, Greenwald says Assange is charged with helping a source preserve anonymity, a common practice by investigative reporters.

Greenwald also [points out](#) that this action has been on public record since 2011, but that U.S. authorities under the Obama administration refused to use it as a basis of prosecution due to the chill it could put on press freedom.

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**UN Visitor**

The UN independent expert on the right to privacy, [Joe Cannataci](#), issued a statement following Assange's arrest. "This will not stop my efforts to assess Mr. Assange's claims that his privacy has been violated," he was quoted by the United Nations' [news service](#). "All it means is that, instead of visiting Mr. Assange and speaking to him at the Embassy. I intend to visit him and speak to him wherever he may be detained."

[Shortly before Assange's expulsion](#), UN Special Rapporteur on Torture [Nils Melzer](#) expressed alarm at reports that an arrest was imminent. If extradited, Melzer said Assange could be exposed to "a real risk of serious violations of his human rights, including his freedom of expression, his right to a fair trial, and the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Assange's supporters likewise fear for his treatment in Belmarsh.

[Matthew Hoh](#), a senior fellow with the Center for International Policy and a former Marine, visited Assange at the embassy. He worries about the mistreatment Assange might face in custody. He believes, "When they get their hands on him, they will do things that will be criminal, it will be immoral, it will be torture," he said during an online [Unity4J](#) vigil held days before Assange's expulsion.

The online [Assange vigils](#) are co-hosted by ***Consortium News*** and have been held for over a year, to maintain public awareness about Assange after Ecuador withdrew his internet access.

Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges, during

a [Unity4J panel](#), offered his fear of what he believes will happen to Assange if he is extradited to the United States :

“He will have a hood over his head, he will be shackled and chained, he’ll be put on a black flight, he will be taken to the U.S., put into solitary confinement – which is a form of torture, it is how people break, and often break very quickly. He will be relentlessly interrogated, there will be all sorts of psychological techniques – it will be very hot in his cell and then very cold. They will constantly wake him every few hours so he will be sleep deprived. They will maybe even put him into a dry cell, where there is no water, so he will have to ask for water to go to the bathroom or wash his hands.”

Hedges continued:

“Everyone has a breaking point, and they will attempt to psychologically destroy him, and we have seen with Guantanamo that several of these detainees, most of whom were just sold to the U.S. by warlords in Afghanistan or Pakistan, are emotionally crippled for life. It will be scientific torture. I used to cover the Stasi state in East Germany, and the joke in the Stasi state was that the Gestapo broke bones and the Stasi break minds, and that’s what they’ll do. That’s what will happen. I’ve seen it with Muslims who have been entrapped in the U.S. in so-called terrorism plots, and by the time they shuffle into court, they are a zombie.”

Hedges [added](#): “There will be a veneer of legality: it will

be the figment of law. But he will be treated like all of the people who have been disappeared into that system from around the world.”

Micol Savia, representative of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers at the United Nations, drew on Chelsea Manning’s experience of [torture in U.S. custody](#) when raising concern that Assange may be likewise abused, writing via [Twitter](#):

“#Assange’s eventual extradition to the US would expose him to a substantive risk of human rights violations. The likely treatment he would receive can easily be inferred from the unjust trial and detention of [Chelsea Manning] @xychelsea, who faced life in prison and was subjected to torture.”

Elizabeth Vos is a freelance reporter and regular contributor to *Consortium News*. She co-hosts the #Unity4J online vigil.

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## CHRIS HEDGES: The Martyrdom of Julian Assange

Assange and *WikiLeaks* allowed us to see the inner workings

of empire – the most important role of a press – and for this they became empire’s prey, writes Chris Hedges of Truthdig.

By **Chris Hedges**

*Truthdig*



The arrest Thursday of Julian Assange eviscerates all pretense of the rule of law and the rights of a free press. The illegalities, embraced by the Ecuadorian, British and U.S. governments, in the seizure of Assange are ominous. They presage a world where the internal workings, abuses, corruption, lies and crimes, especially war crimes, carried out by corporate states and the global ruling elite will be masked from the public. They presage a world where those with the courage and integrity to expose the misuse of power will be hunted down, tortured, subjected to sham trials and given lifetime prison terms in solitary confinement. They presage an Orwellian dystopia where news is replaced with propaganda, trivia and entertainment. The arrest of Assange, I fear, marks the official beginning of the corporate totalitarianism that will define our lives.

Under what law did Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno capriciously terminate Julian Assange’s rights of asylum as a political refugee? Under what law did Moreno authorize British police to enter the Ecuadorian Embassy – diplomatically sanctioned sovereign territory – to arrest a naturalized citizen of Ecuador? Under what law did Prime Minister Theresa May order the British police to grab Assange, who has never committed a crime? Under what law did President Donald Trump demand the extradition of Assange,

who is not a U.S. citizen and whose news organization is not based in the United States?

I am sure government attorneys are skillfully doing what has become de rigueur for the corporate state, using specious legal arguments to eviscerate enshrined rights by judicial fiat. This is how we have the right to privacy with no privacy. This is how we have “free” elections funded by corporate money, covered by a compliant corporate media and under iron corporate control. This is how we have a legislative process in which corporate lobbyists write the legislation and corporate-indentured politicians vote it into law. This is how we have the right to due process with no due process. This is how we have a government – whose fundamental responsibility is to protect citizens – that orders and carries out the assassination of its own citizens such as the radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16-year-old son. This is how we have a press legally permitted to publish classified information and a publisher sitting in jail in Britain awaiting extradition to the United States and a whistleblower, Chelsea Manning, in a jail cell in the United States.

Britain will use as its legal cover for the arrest the extradition request from Washington based on conspiracy charges. This legal argument, in a functioning judiciary, would be thrown out of court. Unfortunately, we no longer have a functioning judiciary. We will soon know if Britain as well lacks one.

### **Refusing Safe Passage**

Assange was granted asylum in the embassy in 2012 to avoid

extradition to Sweden to answer questions about sexual offense allegations that were eventually dropped. Assange and his lawyers always argued that if he was put in Swedish custody he would be extradited to the United States. Once he was granted asylum and Ecuadorian citizenship the British government refused to grant Assange safe passage to the London airport, trapping him in the embassy for seven years as his health steadily deteriorated.

The Trump administration will seek to try Assange on charges that he conspired with Manning in 2010 to steal the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs obtained by *WikiLeaks*. The half a million internal documents leaked by Manning from the Pentagon and the State Department, along with the 2007 video of U.S. helicopter pilots nonchalantly gunning down Iraqi civilians, including children, and two *Reuters* journalists, provided copious evidence of the hypocrisy, indiscriminate violence, and routine use of torture, lies, bribery and crude tactics of intimidation by the U.S. government in its foreign relations and wars in the Middle East. Assange and *WikiLeaks* allowed us to see the inner workings of empire—the most important role of a press—and for this they became empire's prey.

U.S. government lawyers will attempt to separate *WikiLeaks* and Assange from *The New York Times* and the British newspaper *The Guardian*, both of which also published the leaked material from Manning, by implicating Assange in the theft of the documents. Manning was repeatedly and often brutally pressured during her detention and trial to implicate Assange in the seizure of the material, something she steadfastly refused to do. She is currently in jail

because of her refusal to testify, without her lawyer, in front of the grand jury assembled for the Assange case. President Barack Obama granted Manning, who was given a 35-year sentence, clemency after she served seven years in a military prison.

Once the documents and videos provided by Manning to Assange and *WikiLeaks* were published and disseminated by news organizations such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, the press callously, and foolishly, turned on Assange. News organizations that had run *WikiLeaks* material over several days soon served as conduits in a black propaganda campaign to discredit Assange and *WikiLeaks*. This coordinated smear campaign was detailed in a leaked Pentagon document prepared by the Cyber Counterintelligence Assessments Branch and dated March 8, 2008. The document called on the U.S. to eradicate the “feeling of trust” that is *WikiLeaks*’ “center of gravity” and destroy Assange’s reputation.

### **Democrats’ Ire**

Assange, who with the Manning leaks had exposed the war crimes, lies and criminal manipulations of the George W. Bush administration, soon earned the ire of the Democratic Party establishment by publishing 70,000 hacked emails belonging to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and senior Democratic officials. The emails were copied from the accounts of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman. The Podesta emails exposed the donation of millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, two of the major funders of Islamic State, to the Clinton Foundation. It exposed the \$657,000 that Goldman Sachs paid to Hillary Clinton to give talks, a sum so large it can only be

considered a bribe. It exposed Clinton's repeated mendacity. She was caught in the emails, for example, telling the financial elites that she wanted "open trade and open borders" and believed Wall Street executives were best positioned to manage the economy, a statement that contradicted her campaign statements. It exposed the Clinton campaign's efforts to influence the Republican primaries to ensure that Trump was the Republican nominee. It exposed Clinton's advance knowledge of questions in a primary debate. It exposed Clinton as the primary architect of the war in Libya, a war she believed would burnish her credentials as a presidential candidate. Journalists can argue that this information, like the war logs, should have remained hidden, but they can't then call themselves journalists.

The Democratic leadership, intent on blaming Russia for its election loss, charges that the Podesta emails were obtained by Russian government hackers, although James Comey, the former FBI director, has conceded that the emails were probably delivered to *WikiLeaks* by an intermediary. Assange has said the emails were not provided by "state actors."

*WikiLeaks* has done more to expose the abuses of power and crimes of the American Empire than any other news organization. In addition to the war logs and the Podesta emails, it made public the hacking tools used by the CIA and the National Security Agency and their interference in foreign elections, including in the French elections. It disclosed the internal conspiracy against British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn by Labour members of Parliament. It intervened to [save Edward Snowden](#), who made public the

wholesale surveillance of the American public by our intelligence agencies, from extradition to the United States by helping him flee from Hong Kong to Moscow. The Snowden leaks also revealed that Assange was on a U.S. "manhunt target list."

A haggard-looking Assange, as he was dragged out of the embassy by British police, shook his finger and shouted: "The U.K. must resist this attempt by the Trump administration. ... The U.K. must resist!"

We all must resist. We must, in every way possible, put pressure on the British government to halt the judicial lynching of Assange. If Assange is extradited and tried, it will create a legal precedent that will terminate the ability of the press, which Trump repeatedly has called "the enemy of the people," to hold power accountable. The crimes of war and finance, the persecution of dissidents, minorities and immigrants, the pillaging by corporations of the nation and the ecosystem and the ruthless impoverishment of working men and women to swell the bank accounts of the rich and consolidate the global oligarchs' total grip on power will not only expand, but will no longer be part of public debate. First Assange. Then us.

*This [article](#) was originally published on Truthdig and is republished with permission.*

**Chris Hedges is a [Truthdig](#) columnist, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, a *New York Times* best-selling author, a professor in the college degree program offered to New Jersey state prisoners by Rutgers University, and an ordained Presbyterian minister. Read more about him [here](#).**

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## Assange's Lynch Mob Commenters in the NYT

The Gray Lady now seems to be against press freedom, writes James Howard Kunstler.

By [James Howard Kunstler](#)

[Clusterfuck Nation](#)



And so now Julian Assange of *Wikileaks* has been dragged out of his “sanctuary” in the London embassy of Ecuador for failing to clean his cat’s litter box. Have you ever cleaned a litter box?

The way we always did it was to spread some newspaper – say, *The New York Times* – on the floor, transfer the used cat litter onto it, wrap it into a compact package, and put it in the trash.

It was interesting to scan the comments section of the *Times*’s stories about the Assange arrest: [Times readers](#) almost uniformly presented themselves as a lynch mob out for Assange’s blood. So much for the spirit of liberalism and the old “Gray Lady” who published *The Pentagon Papers* purloined by Daniel Ellsberg lo so many years ago. Reading between the lines in that once-venerable newspaper – by which I mean gleaning their slant on the news – one surmises that the *Times* has actually come out *against* freedom of the press, a curious attitude, but consistent with the neo-Jacobin zeitgeist in “blue” America these days.

Anyway, how could anyone expect Assange to clean his cat's litter box when he was unable to go outside his sanctuary to buy a fresh bag of litter, and was denied newspapers this past year, as well as any other contact with the outside world?

U.S. government prosecutors had better tread lightly in bringing Assange to the sort of justice demanded by readers of *The New York Times* – which is to say: lock him up in some SuperMax solitary hellhole and throw away the key. The show trial of Julian Assange on U.S. soil, when it comes to pass, may end up being the straw that stirs America's Mickey Finn as a legitimate republic.

### **Symptom of Mass Confusion**

The bloodthirsty hysteria among *New York Times* readers is a symptom of the mass confusion sown by agencies of the U.S. government itself when its own agents ventured to meddle in the national election of 2016 and then blame it on “the Russians.” As you will learn in the months ahead, it was the *Times* itself, and other corporate news organizations, who *colluded* with officers of the FBI, the Department of Justice, the CIA, and the Obama White House to concoct a phony narrative about Trump being in cahoots with Vladimir Putin, thus depriving Hillary Clinton of her “turn” in the White House; and then to join those agencies, and the grotesquely dishonest two-year investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, in a cover-your-ass operation to hide their nefarious and criminal acts.

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## SUPREME COURT, 6-3, UPHOLDS NEWSPAPERS ON PUBLICATION OF THE PENTAGON REPORT; TIMES RESUMES ITS SERIES, HALTED 15 DAYS

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To Ban the Opium Poppy

PRESIDENT CALLS  
STEEL AND LABOR

Pentagon Papers: Study Reports Kennedy  
Made 'Gamble' Into a 'Broad Commitment'

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By JOHN

By WILLIAM

By HEDRICK SMITH

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First Amendment Rule

The USA has a lot of sorting to do and, of course, the new Democratic-led Congress is already trying as hard as possible to prevent that from happening, the latest being their piling on Attorney General William Barr for testifying under oath that he believed the government ran a spying operation on candidate Donald Trump. The existence of FISA warrants establishes that as a fact, as does the million-dollar payment by the CIA and U.S. Defense Department to international man of mystery Stefan Halper, the secret agent (posing as an Oxford professor) commissioned to entrap Trump campaign associate Carter Page. The ugly cascade of truth about that ploy, and many other seditious subterfuges run by U.S. officials, will eventually bury the Jacobin "resistance" under more used cat litter than the Ecuadorian embassy staff could ever dream of.

The official charges so far against Julian Assange include skipping bail in the U.K. and supposedly attempting to assist the U.S. soldier then known as Bradley Manning to find a password for entering certain U.S. government computer data bases. The U.K. bail matter revolved around

Assange's extradition to Sweden on a bullshit rape charge that was subsequently dropped as having no merit by Swedish authorities.

The U.S. supposedly reserves the authority to lob additional charges at Assange, though they may face a lengthy extradition battle with his attorneys to lever him out of the U.K. and into U.S. custody. In the meantime, Assange may receive a Nobel Prize as a symbol of a lone conscience standing up against the despotic deceits of the world's Deep States. Wouldn't that gum up the works nicely? I'd like to see *The New York Times's* front page headline on that story: "Russian Colluder Wins Nobel Prize, Put on Trial in Federal Court." By then, the United States of America will be so completely gaslighted that it will pulsate in the darkness like a death star about to explode.

**James Howard Kunstler is author of "The Geography of Nowhere," which he says he wrote "Because I believe a lot of people share my feelings about the tragic landscape of highway strips, parking lots, housing tracts, mega-malls, junked cities, and ravaged countryside that makes up the everyday environment where most Americans live and work." He has written several other works of nonfiction and fiction. Read more about him [here](#). This article first appeared on his blog, [ClusterfuckNation](#).**

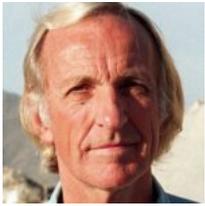
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## JOHN PILGER: Assange Arrest a Warning from History

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](http://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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.**

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## Moreno Withdraws Asylum as Assange is Arrested

The WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been arrested after the Ecuadorian president, Lenin Moreno, withdrew Assange’s asylum, in a move that runs counter to international asylum law.

## **Charged With Conspiracy to Hack Government Computer; Not Espionage**

WikiLeaks tweeted that Ecuador allowed British police into the London embassy to arrest Assange at around 10:30 am British time, 5:30 am in Washington.

The U.S. charged Assange with conspiracy to hack a computer government computer related to the 2010 release of classified information, according to the criminal complaint unsealed hours after his arrest. The indictment does not charge Assange with espionage.

URGENT

Julian Assange did not "walk out of the embassy". The Ecuadorian ambassador invited British police into the embassy and he was immediately arrested.

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 11, 2019](#)

This is the moment when Assange was dragged out by police. He was heard to say, "The UK must resist this...the UK must resist."

BREAK: Full [@Ruptly](#) video of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's arrest by British police this morning [pic.twitter.com/tdBw1Kbpxn](#)

– Barnaby Nerberka (@barnabynerberka) [April 11, 2019](#)

Assange was taken with an arrest warrant for skipping bail when he entered the Ecuadorian embassy in June 2012, fearing extradition to the United States, where there is a sealed indictment with his name on it. Assange lawyer Jennifer Robinson tweeted that he has been arrested for breach of bail conditions and also because of a request for extradition from the U.S.

Just confirmed: [#Assange](#) has been arrested not just for breach of bail conditions but also in relation to a US extradition request. [@wikileaks](#) [@khrafnsson](#)

– Jen Robinson (@suigenerisjen) [April 11, 2019](#)

From [#Assange](#): The US warrant was issued in December 2017 and is for conspiracy with Chelsea Manning [@xychelsea](#) in early 2010.

– Jen Robinson (@suigenerisjen) [April 11, 2019](#)

Assange was taken to a police station and will later be brought to [Magistrate's court](#), according to a tweet from Christine Assange, Julian's mother.

I have just spoken to one of Julians lawyers.

Julian is likely to appear before a UK Magistrate within 24 hrs re (old defunct) "bail warrant"

UK likely to seek max prison term of 12 months in higher court.

Our focus is as always to STOP a U.S. Extradition!

Let's get to it!

– Mrs. Christine Assange (@AssangeMrs) [April 11, 2019](#)

Former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correrá reacted by calling Moreno the “greatest traitor in Ecuadorian and Latin American history.”

Full translation: “The greatest traitor in Ecuadorian and Latin American history, Lenin Moreno, allowed the British police to enter our embassy in London to arrest Assange. Moreno is a corrupt, but what he has done is a crime that humanity will never forget.”

El traidor más grande de la historia ecuatoriana y latinoamericana, Lenín Moreno, permitió que la policía británica entre a nuestra embajada en Londres para arrestar a Assange.

Moreno es un corrupto, pero lo que ha hecho es un crimen que la humanidad jamás olvidará. <https://t.co/GwZ40Lreuo>

– Rafael Correa (@MashiRafael) [April 11, 2019](#)

Moreno made a national television address to announce his decision. While the expulsion of a refugee to a country that could harm him for political reasons, known as [refoulement](#), is against international law, Moreno accused Assange of “repeated violations to international conventions and daily-life protocols.”

Ecuador decidió soberanamente retirar el asilo diplomático a Julian Assange por violar reiteradamente convenciones internacionales y protocolo de convivencia. [#EcuadorSoberano](#) <pic.twitter.com/V02pvvtPY0>

– Lenín Moreno (@Lenin) [April 11, 2019](#)

Unity4J will hold an emergency vigil under the hashtag [#FreeJulian](#) beginning at noon U.S. Eastern Standard Time that will be webcast live on ***Consortium News***.

NSA whistleblower Ed Snowden reacted on Twitter:

Images of Ecuador's ambassador inviting the UK's secret police into the embassy to drag a publisher of—like it or not—award-winning journalism out of the building are going to end up in the history books. Assange's critics may cheer, but this is a dark moment for press freedom. <https://t.co/ys1AIdh2FP>

– Edward Snowden (@Snowden) [April 11, 2019](#)

Journalist and filmmaker John Pilger tweeted:

The action of the British police in literally dragging Julian Assange from the Ecuadorean embassy and the smashing of international law by the Ecuadorean regime in permitting this barbarity are crimes against the most basic natural

justice. This is a warning to all journalists.

– John Pilger (@johnpilger) [April 11, 2019](#)

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## Spanish Police Probe Extortion Scheme Involving Surveillance on Assange

UPDATED: Suspects are being investigated in Spain for having tried to extort €3 million from WikiLeaks in exchange for a huge cache of documents and surveillance videos of Assange inside Ecuador's London embassy, including with his doctors and lawyers.

By [Joe Lauria](#)

*Special to Consortium News*

**A** Spanish judge is investigating an alleged extortion scheme

in which suspects in Madrid offered video and audio surveillance to the editor of WikiLeaks in exchange for €3 million, WikiLeaks said on Wednesday.

The surveillance was taken over the past year inside the Ecuador embassy in London where WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has legally been granted political asylum since 2012, said Kristinn Hrafnsson, the WikiLeaks editor, at a press conference in the British capital. Included in the "trove" of material was a copy of a legal document regarding Assange's defense strategy that was briefly left behind in a conference room in the embassy, Hrafnsson said.

"It is a grave and serious concern when legal meetings are being spied upon and legal documents are stolen," he said. "That is something that not even prisoners have to endure."

Assange was also filmed being examined by his doctor in the embassy, Hrafnsson said. "Nobody expected that this was recorded and stored and found its way to some dubious individuals in Spain," he said.

Jennifer Robinson, Assange's lawyer, called it a breach of attorney-client privilege. "The documents you have seen [presented at the press conference] demonstrates just how much surveillance he has been under and it is a breach of confidence for us, his lawyers, and his doctors to provide medical care in the embassy," Robinson said. "This is a severe breach of attorney-client privilege and fundamentally undermines our ability to defend and provide defense to Julian Assange."

Hrafnsson communicated with the alleged extortioners and was given samples of what they possessed, the WikiLeaks editor

said. He then traveled to Spain and secretly videotaped a meeting with “four individuals” in which Hrafnsson learned the extent of the material that they possessed. They told him that €3 million was “a good deal” as they had had offers of €9 million for the material. Hrafnsson then went to the Spanish police who opened an investigation. He said he knew the identity of one of the four who had a prior conviction on similar charges and was seen as the “ringleader.”

### **Sting Operation**

Aitor Martinez, the Assange lawyer who said he’d briefly left the legal document in the embassy conference room that was copied, then took part in a sting operation with the police. He wore a wire as he met with the alleged extortioners in Madrid, Hrafnsson said. A full investigation by a special extortion team was then opened and the case is now in the hands of an investigative judge, he said.

“Extortion is a serious matter,” Hrafnsson said, “but of greater concern to me is that this is material gathered by spying by the government of Lenin Moreno and officials who work on his behalf against an individual who was granted diplomatic protection by the Ecuadorian government.”

In an apparent reference to Moreno, Hrafnsson said: “We know from reports that this is the work of one person to service the interests of the United States government who want to indict and imprison a publisher for the crime of publishing truthful material.”

Robinson said WikiLeaks would file a “fresh complaint” to the UN special rapporteur on privacy rights, who has said he

will visit Assange on April 25. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer will also visit Assange that day, WikiLeaks said.

Robinson criticized the British government for being poised to arrest and extradite Assange to the United States. "That a government would cooperate with another state to extradite a publisher for publishing truthful information outside its territory sets a dangerous precedent here in the UK and elsewhere," she said. "No one can deny that risk. That is why he sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy."

Fidel Narváez, the former Ecuadorian consul at the embassy who said he saw Assange everyday for six years, told the press conference: "I very much hope that what we presented today will break the shield that currently the Ecuadorian government has built in my country...aided by the Ecuadorian press that is not doing what it should do to challenge and question the government." He added: "There is lots of misinformation about Julian's asylum but one thing is clear: the new government of Ecuador is not protecting Julian Assange anymore as it should."

## **Diplomat Fired**

On Friday WikiLeaks tweeted that a "high-level" source in the Ecuador government told WikiLeaks that Assange's expulsion and arrest would come in "hours to days." That set off a worldwide reaction of Assange supporters as well as by UN special rapporteurs. Heavily armed police have roamed the environs of the embassy, and people in unmarked cars have been parked outside, either as a form of intimidation or on standby waiting for orders to move in.

“The only reason it hasn’t happened yet is because of the international shame that will be attached to Ecuador if it does so,” Narváez said. “The government is clearly building a case to end the asylum and what we’ve seen here is the basis for that.”

Walk up to one of the "undercover" cars staking out the Ecuadorian embassy in London. This particular car has seen three shifts of different pairs of people over the last twenty hours. Engines running, lights on. Watcher makes call under head cover. [pic.twitter.com/e778EN0nU6](https://pic.twitter.com/e778EN0nU6) <https://t.co/cPfdib4kat>

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 9, 2019](#)

WikiLeaks on Tuesday said that Ecuador had fired a diplomat from the embassy, accusing him of being “close” to Assange. The tweet implied that the diplomat may have been WikiLeaks’s source about Assange’s imminent expulsion and arrest.

Ecuador: we just fired an official "close to Assange" for not being loyal

Ecuadorian statement comes after a leak that it was planning to hand Assange over to be arrested, violating his asylum, after US pressure and inducements, within "hours to days". <https://t.co/TH1qTFxVbm>

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 9, 2019](#)

The central question that remains is who had access to the surveillance material and then transferred it to the alleged extortioners. “I don’t know very much about that,” Hrafnsson said. “I assume that will be part of the investigation by the Spanish police authorities and by the Spanish lawyers. However we do have more material that I recorded in Spain and it will possibly cast more light on that chain—how it ended up in Spain. We will make it available online shortly.

[But] I don't want to speculate how that came about."

The Ecuadorian government had prime possession of surveillance and the British and U.S. governments could have also obtained it, given their close contacts with Ecuador on Assange. However there would be little apparent motive for these governments to have made the surveillance known.

"Let's remember that Julian Assange is not serving a sentence, he doesn't have charges," Narváez said. "He is a political refugee. Political refugees do not lose rights. On the contrary, they should have their rights protected."

The following is the full video of the one-hour press conference held in London on Wednesday:

**Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at [joelauria@consortiumnews.com](mailto:joelauria@consortiumnews.com) and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .**

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## Is Assange a Journalist?

When someone says "Assange isn't a journalist", they aren't telling you what Assange is. They're showing you who they are, says Caitlin Johnstone. Plus Ray McGovern answered the question on CNN nine years ago.

By [Caitlin Johnstone](https://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)

[CaitlinJohnstone.com](https://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)



As [discussed Saturday](#), whenever Julian Assange is in the news and people are defending him you always see a bunch of hyper-emotional empire loyalists running around online trying to manage the narrative about him. One of the most common talking points which comes up is that Assange is “not a journalist”.

The reason this talking point comes up, of course, is because the WikiLeaks founder is besieged by powerful forces who are attempting to imprison him for publishing inconvenient facts about them, and his defenders often voice their concerns about what this means for the future of press freedoms. The completely baseless claim that Assange is “not a journalist” is used in an attempt to defuse the argument that his prosecution by the U.S. government could lead to the same fate for any news media outlet which publishes leaks on the US government anywhere in the world. If he’s not a journalist, then his prosecution sets no precedent for real journalists.

This argument, if you can call it that, is fallacious for a number of reasons. For starters, as *The Intercept*’s Glenn Greenwald [explained last year](#), there’s not any legal distinction in the U.S. Constitution between news media outlets like the *The New York Times* and an outlet which solely focuses on publishing leaks. If you set the precedent with any publisher, you’re necessarily setting it for all of them. Greenwald writes the following:

To begin with, the press freedom guarantee of the First Amendment isn’t confined to “legitimate news outlets” – whatever that might mean. The First Amendment isn’t

available only to a certain class of people licensed as “journalists.” It protects not a privileged group of people called “professional journalists” but rather *an activity*: namely, using the press (which at the time of the First Amendment’s enactment meant the literal printing press) to inform the public about what the government was doing. *Everyone* is entitled to that constitutional protection equally: there is no cogent way to justify why the Guardian, ex-DOJ-officials-turned-bloggers, or Marcy Wheeler are free to publish classified information but Julian Assange and WikiLeaks are not.

Secondly, anyone with a functioning brain can see that Julian Assange is indeed a journalist. Publishing facts so that the citizenry can inform themselves about what’s going on in their world and what’s happening with their government is the thing that journalism is. Duh. The need for an informed citizenry is the entire reason why press freedoms are protected so explicitly under the U.S. Constitution, and publishing facts about the most powerful institutions on earth indisputably does create a more informed citizenry.

You can look at any conventional dictionary definition of the word and come to the same conclusion. [\*Merriam-Webster\*](#) offers “the public press” and “the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media”. The *Oxford English Dictionary* [\*offers\*](#), “The activity or profession of writing for newspapers, magazines, or news websites or preparing news to be broadcast.” *Your Dictionary* [\*offers\*](#), “the work of finding, creating, editing and publishing news, or material written and presented for a newspaper, magazine or broadcast news source.” These are activities that WikiLeaks is

undeniably involved in; they collect and publish newsworthy information to be circulated by themselves and other news sources. The fact that they do their part differently (and better) than other outlets doesn't change that.

Which explains why the WikiLeaks team has racked up numerous awards for journalism over the years, including the Walkley Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism (2011), the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism (2011), the International Piero Pasetti Journalism Prize of the National Union of Italian Journalists (2011), the Jose Couso Press Freedom Award (2011), the Brazillian Press Association Human Rights Award (2013), and the Kazakstan Union of Journalists Top Prize (2014).

The claim that Assange is “not a journalist” is both an irrelevant red herring and a self-evident falsehood. It is made not by people with an interest in maintaining a small and specific linguistic understanding of what the word journalism means, but by people who want to see Julian Assange imprisoned by the same government which tortured Chelsea Manning because he made them feel emotionally upset. It's a fact-free argument made entirely in bad faith for inexcusable motives: the desire to see a journalist imprisoned for telling the truth.

When someone says “Assange isn't a journalist”, they aren't telling you what Assange is. They're showing you what they are.

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*As early as Dec. 2010, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern on CNN answered the same question, arguing that Assange is a journalist, not a “high-tech terrorist.” McGovern was never*

*invited back to CNN domestic service after this interview and only once more on CNN International.*

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly [at Medium](#). Follow her work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#). She has a [podcast](#) and a new book [“Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers.”](#) This article was re-published with permission.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A CIA analyst for 27 years and Washington area resident for 56 years, he has been attuned to these machinations. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

**We got Russia-gate right. Help us to [keep on going](#).**

**Please make a tax-deductible [donation](#) to our Spring Fund Drive!**

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Daniel Ellsberg, John Kiriakou, Lee Camp and Many More in Marathon Assange Vigil

Unity4J held an online vigil from Friday and through Monday morning after two sources in the Ecuadorian government told WikiLeaks it can expect Julian Assange to be expelled from the London Embassy within “hours or days.”

Among the guests who joined the #ProtectJulian webcast to discuss the latest threat from Ecuador, were famed Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg; CIA whistleblower John Kiriakou; comedians Lee Camp and Ron Placone; former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel; journalists Jose Rivera, Dmitry Babich, Gareth Porter, Cassandra Fairbanks (from outside the embassy), Margaret Kimberley and Patrick Henningsen; former CIA analyst Ray McGovern; activists Margaret Flowers, Kevin Zeese, and Niko House; academics Piers Robinson and many more. The hosts were Elizabeth Vos, Suzie Dawson, Vivian Kubrick and Joe Lauria. The vigil can be seen here:

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## BREAKING: Assange 'Will Be' Arrested in 'Hours to Days,' WikiLeaks Says

WikiLeaks has quoted a "high-level" Ecuadorian government source as saying that Julian Assange could be imminently expelled from Ecuador's London embassy and that Quito has an agreement with the UK to arrest him.

**By Joe Lauria**

*Special to Consortium News*

WikiLeaks warned Thursday that its founder "will be expelled within 'hours to days'" from Ecuador's London embassy and that Ecuador has an agreement with Britain to have him arrested.

President Lenin Moreno will use the pretext of a scandal engulfing his presidency to oust Assange, a "high level source" in the Ecuador government told WikiLeaks.

BREAKING: A high level source within the Ecuadorian state has told [@WikiLeaks](#) that Julian Assange will be expelled within "hours to days" using the [#INAPapers](#) offshore scandal as a pretext—and that it already has an agreement with the UK for his arrest.<https://t.co/adnJph79wq>

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 4, 2019](#)

Moreno has [accused WikiLeaks](#) of leaking documents allegedly implicating him and his family in a corruption scheme with a Panamanian investment firm, INA Investments Corp. WikiLeaks has denied being behind the leaks and no documents related to the scandal appear on its website.

Moreno said the alleged leak by WikiLeaks is a breach in a “protocol” with Assange that allows him to remain in the London embassy in exchange for his public silence on all political matters. Assange has never agreed to the protocol. His social media accounts were shut down by Ecuador in March 2018.

Because of this so-called “breach,” Assange will be made to leave the embassy and would be arrested by British authorities. Assange has been a refugee inside the embassy since 2012, fearing that if he were to be arrested the UK would extradite him to the United States to stand trial for publishing classified information.

Last week Assange engaged in a [shouting match](#) with Ecuador’s ambassador inside the embassy. The move to expel Assange has been building for months. Last week Defend Assange, a [publication](#) of WikiLeaks-linked Courage Foundation, reported:

“On 28 March, [Communications Minister Andrés Michelena](#)

told CNN Español that the INApapers were part of a plot [by] Julian Assange, Venezuelan President Maduro and former Ecuadorian President Correa to bring down Moreno's government. [Michelena] added, 'You have to understand how these people are connected, Mr. Assange is the Troll Center, the hacker for former President Correa, [Assange] handles the technological and social media side.'

That same day, the national assembly, in which Moreno's party and other right parties command a majority, passed a resolution inviting the Foreign Ministry to take action against Assange's asylum on the basis of the INApapers leak "in the national interest" if it considers it pertinent to do so."

Supporters of WikiLeaks and Assange rapidly called for an increased presence at the Ecuadorian Embassy, located at Number 3, Hans Crescent in London.

Julian Assange's mother, Christine Assange, tweeted:

URGENT

Julian about to be expelled from Embassy into hands of UK (US)!

NEEDED NOW!

\* 24/7 Citizens Vigil

\*24/7 Livestreaming using hashtag #ProtectJulian

WHERE:#Ecuador Embassy

3 Hans Cres

LONDON

(Knightsbridge Railway Station/Piccadilly line)

Please RT/share widely <https://t.co/SARV6m7p4Z>

– Mrs. Christine Assange (@AssangeMrs) April 4, 2019

A live stream of what is happening outside the embassy can be found [here](#):

Award-winning journalist and filmmaker [John Pilger](#) wrote via Twitter: “WikiLeaks reports that Julian Assange is on the verge of being expelled from the Ecuadorean Embassy in London. Please fill the street outside the embassy and protect him, and show solidarity with a courageous man, whose struggle ought to touch us all.” A marathon online vigil for Assange will begin Friday at 4 pm EST, to be webcast by ***Consortium News***.

Christine Assange, whose Twitter account has twice been [restricted](#) in the past two weeks, is expected on the vigil.

*Elizabeth Vos contributed to this story.*

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