

# New CN Series: The Revelations of WikiLeaks: No. 1—The Video that Put Assange in US Crosshairs

[“Collateral Murder”](#) created a media sensation in 2010 and led to Chelsea Manning’s imprisonment and to a DOJ investigation of Julian Assange, reports Elizabeth Vos. But the war crimes the video exposed got no one else in trouble.

**Consortium News** today begins a series of articles, *“The Revelations of WikiLeaks,”* that will look back on the major works of the publication that have altered the world since its founding in 2006. This series is an effort to counter mainstream media coverage, which is ignoring WikiLeaks’ work, and instead is focusing on Julian Assange’s personality. It is the uncovering by WikiLeaks of governments’ crimes and corruption that set the U.S. after Assange and which ultimately led to his arrest on April 11. The *“Collateral Murder”* video was just the first of many major WikiLeaks revelations that made the journalist one of the world’s most wanted men, simply for the act of publishing.

## **The Video that Put Julian Assange in the Crosshairs of the United States**

By [Elizabeth Vos](#)

*Special to Consortium News*



*WikiLeaks* was founded in 2006, but it was the April 5, 2010, publication of "Collateral Murder" that made the whistleblower-publisher a world-wide phenomenon, attracting admirers and enemies.

WikiLeaks wrote of the film: "The video, shot from an Apache helicopter gun-sight, clearly shows the unprovoked slaying of a wounded Reuters employee and his rescuers. Two young children involved in the rescue were also seriously wounded."

*WikiLeaks* noted that Reuters had unsuccessfully attempted to gain access to the video through the Freedom of Information Act in the years after the strike.

The day after the release of the footage, The New York Times described *WikiLeaks* as a once-fringe website that had moved into the big time. "The site has become a thorn in the side of authorities in the United States and abroad," it said. "With the Iraq attack video, the clearinghouse for sensitive documents is edging closer toward a form of investigative journalism and to advocacy."

Before 2010 *WikiLeaks* received a few high-profile journalism awards. But in the years since the publication of the video, it has received a slew of honors, including The Sam Adams Award for Integrity.

On April 16, *WikiLeaks* announced a fresh award for its founder, Julian Assange, even as he remains isolated in a London prison.

The Sydney Morning Herald: Julian Assange wins EU journalism award established in honour of an assassinated journalist.<https://t.co/FlA6DpNzc9?>

[pic.twitter.com/y0pda8pgwR](https://pic.twitter.com/y0pda8pgwR)

– WikiLeaks (@wikileaks) [April 16, 2019](#)

## Chelsea Manning

“Collateral Murder” was one of the most prominent releases sourced from then-Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, who served seven years in a military prison as a result.

Manning, who had access to the video, having a Top Secret clearance, first offered the video to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, which both turned her down. Manning then turned to *WikiLeaks*.

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Manning [described the events](#) that led up to her decision to submit the footage to the press in leaked audio of her testimony during her 2013 court-martial.

She said Reuters’ inability to get the footage via a freedom-of-information request contributed to her decision to leak it. “The most alarming aspect of the video for me, was the seemingly delight of bloodlust they [the pilots] appeared to have. They dehumanized the individuals they were engaging with, and seemed to not value human life in referring to them as ‘dead bastards,’ and congratulating each other on the ability to kill in large numbers.”

[Marjorie Cohn](#), a legal analyst, is one of those who has described the contents of the footage as evidence of U.S. war crimes. As such she [argues](#) that Manning was legally

obligated to expose such information. In a 2013 column for *Truthout*, she cites the Geneva Conventions, the Army Field Manual and the Uniform Code of Military Justice as all setting forth the duty of a service member to disobey unlawful orders.

None of the pilots, military officials nor policy-makers have ever been charged or otherwise held responsible for the events shown in the video.

### **U.S. Army 2007 Apache Helicopter Attack**

The film depicts the July 12, 2007, shooting of over a dozen Iraqis by U.S. Army Apache helicopters armed with 30mm cannons in the Al-Amin al-Thaniyah neighborhood of New Baghdad, a district of Iraq's capital city. The dead included Reuters' photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen and his assistant, Saeed Chmagh. *WikiLeaks* has said as many as 25 people were killed as a result of the incident.

After the initial attack, the helicopters fired on and killed people who stopped to try to rescue the wounded. A U.S. tank reportedly drove over a body, cutting it in half. Assange identified the individual run over by the tank as Namir Noor-Eldeen in an interview with Al Jazeera days after the publication of "Collateral Murder."

After receiving the encrypted footage, Assange and his associates spent a week working non-stop in Reykjavik, Iceland, to break the U.S. military's encryption of the video.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, who now serves as editor-in-chief of

*WikiLeaks*, went to Iraq as an investigative journalist to locate victims' families and confirm details of the event prior to the film's publication. [The New Yorker](#) reported:

“He [Hrafnsson] claims to have found the owner of the building, an old man named Jabbar Abid Rady, born in 1941, a retired English teacher. Abid Rady told Hrafnsson that his wife and daughter had died in the attack. He said that five other people who had been living in the building died, too. Buildings under construction often serve as housing in war-ravaged places; people live in the lower floors, which are often built first and are inhabitable before construction ends. Abid Rady told Hrafnsson that three families had been living in this particular structure.”

Assange noted how the moving images had stirred public attention far more than any printed matter. “It’s very easy for people to see what’s going on,” he is quoted as saying in the April 2010 video interview with [Al Jazeera](#). “It’s not too complex, there’s no language barriers with visual material. We released the policies behind this material as far back as 2007, classified US military policies.”

At one point in the video, American personnel can be heard laughing, saying: “The tank just drove over a body.” Assange commented on that, saying, “That was Namir’s body.”

### **Military’s Response**

Shortly after the 2007 killings – and three years before the video was released – the U.S. military was [quoted](#)

as underreporting the death toll and context of the incident.

Assange argued that the military's reports of a "firefight" preceding the events shown on tape had been misrepresented in order to justify the killings.

After *WikiLeaks*' release of "Collateral Murder," the Pentagon acknowledged the authenticity of the video but said it did not contradict the official finding that the helicopters' crew acted within the rules of engagement," *The Daily Telegraph* reported.

The U.S. military rejected calls to discipline the crew for the deaths of the Reuters journalists because it said the men could not be distinguished from suspected insurgents. "The RPG in the video is real," *The Telegraph* quoted a Pentagon spokesman as saying. "We had insurgents and reporters in an area where U.S. forces were about to be ambushed. At the time we weren't able to discern whether (Reuters employees) were carrying cameras or weapons."

Retired Lieutenant Colonel Chris Walach, commander of the Apache helicopter pilots, in 2013, spoke with *Democracy Now* about the footage. "In Iraq, you can't put pink gloves on Apache helicopter pilots and send them into the Ultimate Fighting ring and ask them to take a knee," he said. "These are attack pilots wearing gloves of steel, and they go into the ring throwing powerful punches of explosive steel. They are there to win, and they will win."

Shortly after "Collateral Murder's" publication, Assange appeared on the "Colbert Report." At one point, host Stephen Colbert joked that Assange is "a dead man." Colbert asked

Assange about allegations of a firefight preceding the events shown on the tape. "That's a lie," Assange responded. [05.20/11:39] He said that 28 minutes earlier there had been a report of small arms fire and that the Apache helicopters circling New Baghdad "came across these men and killed them."

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## The Politicians React

On April 11, 2019, the day Assange was arrested, Reuters' reporter Alistair Smout wrote in hindsight: "*WikiLeaks* incensed Washington by publishing hundreds of thousands of secret U.S. diplomatic cables, and in 2010 a classified U.S. military video showing a helicopter attack in Baghdad in 2007 that killed a dozen people, including two Reuters news staff."

Within days of the publication of "Collateral Murder," Obama Whitehouse Press Secretary Robert Gibbs answered questions from reporters on the contents of the video. When asked whether the actions of the U.S. personnel were "appropriate," Gibbs said that he was not sure whether then-President Barack Obama had seen the video, adding:

"Many of you all have traveled with the President – this President or other Presidents in war zones. Many of you know colleagues that have reported from exceedingly dangerous places in the world. Our military will take every precaution necessary to ensure the safety and security of civilians, and particularly those that report in those dangerous places on behalf of news organizations. I honestly do not know enough about what was done

previous, which is why I'd point you to the Department of Defense."

Then U.S. Defense Secretary [Robert Gates](#) blasted *WikiLeaks* for not providing context for the video. "These people can put out anything they want, and they're never held accountable for it. There's no before and there's no after," Gates said, likening the video as seeing warfare "through a soda straw."

Gates said: "They're in a combat situation. The video doesn't show the broader picture of the firing that was going on at American troops. It's obviously a hard thing to see. It's painful to see, especially when you learn after the fact what was going on. But you—you talked about the fog of war. These people were operating in split second situations."

The strongest response to the video came in the form of a U.S. Department of Justice investigation of Assange, by at most six months after "Collateral Murder," and subsequent releases of the Afghan and Iraq War Logs, the next subject of CN's series, that ultimately culminated in his arrest on April 11, 2019.

"The investigation has been quietly gathering material since at least October 2010, six months after the arrest of Pfc. Bradley Manning, the army enlistee who is accused of providing the bulk of the leaks," *The New York Times* [reported](#) in June 2013.

The FBI had begun investigating Assange and *WikiLeaks* as early as 2009, according to an [affidavit](#) given by Assange in



September 2013.

While the Obama DOJ stopped short of crossing a red line to criminalize journalism, the Trump DOJ has stomped over it using the same evidence abandoned by the previous administration.

## Media Response

“Collateral Murder” was unveiled at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington on April 5, 2010. *The New York Times* reported:

“There is no question that coalition forces were clearly engaged in combat operations against a hostile force,” Lt. Col. Scott Bleichwehl, a spokesman for the multinational forces in Baghdad, said then.

But the video does not show hostile action. Instead, it begins with a group of people milling around on a street, among them, according to WikiLeaks, Mr. Noor-Eldeen and Mr. Chmagh. The pilots believe them to be insurgents, and mistake Mr. Noor-Eldeen’s camera for a weapon. They aim and fire at the group, then revel in their kills.”

The media’s reaction to the video’s release was mixed. The day after it was published, the *Times* ran a report, titled: “Iraq Video Brings Notice to a Web Site.” It described criticism *WikiLeaks* received for publishing an edited version of the footage:

“Critics contend that the shorter video was misleading because it did not make clear that the attacks took place

amid clashes in the neighborhood and that one of the men was carrying a rocket-propelled grenade.”

Within months of the video’s release, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation [noted](#) the sentiments of journalist David Finkel of *The Washington Post*: “They [WikiLeaks] provided artificial agenda driven context. There was an operation underway in reaction to an ongoing war. Not that apache helicopters were circling looking for a bunch of guys to just shoot up and kill.” Finkel was stationed in Iraq in 2007 when the incident occurred and included the event in his book, “The Good Soldiers.”

In response to such criticism, Assange told [Al Jazeera](#) that the decision to give the film its title hinged on the moment where the Apache helicopter pilots shot at the van and individuals who had stopped to aid the wounded. He said:

“This is why we called it ‘Collateral Murder.’ In the first example, maybe it’s a collateral exaggeration or incompetence, when they strafe this initial gathering. This was recklessness bordering on murder, but we couldn’t say for sure that was murder. But this particular event, this is clearly murder.”

Media that have since turned on Assange, at the time praised him and *WikiLeaks*.

On the day the video was released, *The Guardian*, which has lately been on an anti-Assange campaign, was quick to write an article that referred to the problems the video posed for military authorities: [“The release of the video from](#)

Baghdad also comes shortly after the US military admitted that its special forces attempted to cover up the killings of three Afghan women in a raid in February by digging the bullets out of their bodies.”

Two days after “Collateral Murder’s” publication, *The Guardian*, then under editor Alan Rusbridger, published an opinion piece saying the footage was “heralded by some as the most important revelation since Abu Ghraib, and challenges not only the effectiveness of the US military’s rules of engagement policy, but also the integrity of the mainstream media’s coverage of similar incidents.”

James Fallows of The Atlantic called “Collateral Murder” the “most damaging documentation of abuse since the Abu Ghraib prison-torture photos” 12 hours after the video’s release.

“The Collateral Murder video is one of the best known and most widely recognized results of the ongoing WikiLeaks project,” Christian Christensen, a University of Stockholm journalism professor wrote in 2014. “These particular images were, in many ways, the crystallization of the horrors of war.”

Within days of the video’s publication, Haifa Zangana, a novelist and former prisoner of Saddam Hussein’s regime, wrote an op-ed for *The Guardian*, saying her family lived in the area where the events took place, which she described as having previously been “safe for children to play outdoors.”

Zangana continued:

“Witnesses to the slaughter reported the harrowing details in 2007, but they had to wait for a western whistleblower to hand over a video before anyone listened. Watching the

video, my first impression was, I have no impression. But the total numbness gradually grows into a now familiar anger. I listen to the excited voices of death coming from the sky, enjoying the chase and killing. I whisper: do they think they are God?"

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

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## The Buried Maidan Massacre and Its Misrepresentation by the West

The new Ukrainian government is faced with reopening an inquiry into evidence of an organized mass killing in Kiev that Poroshenko stonewalled. Ivan Katchanovski investigates.

**By Ivan Katchanovski**

*Special to Consortium News*



**F**ive years ago, the Maidan massacre in Kiev, Ukraine, of Feb. 18-20, 2014, was a watershed event, not only for the politics and history of Ukraine but also for world politics generally.

This mass killing in downtown Kyiv set the stage for the violent overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine and a new Cold War between Washington and Moscow.

Therefore, it is remarkable that five years after this massacre shook the world, no one has been sentenced for any of the Maidan killings. This was the best documented case of mass killing in history, broadcast live on TV and the internet, in presence of thousands of eyewitnesses. It was filmed by hundreds of journalists from major media in the West, Ukraine, Russia, and many other countries as well as by numerous social media users. Yet, to this day, no one has been brought to justice for this major and consequential crime.

From the start, the dominant narrative promoted by the Ukrainian and Western governments and mainstream media has placed the blame for this tragedy firmly on the Yanukovich government. It contends that forces loyal to former President Victor Yanukovich— either snipers and/or the Berkut, a special anti-riot police— massacred peaceful Maidan protesters on the direct orders of Yanukovich himself. Such charges against Yanukovich, his ministers and commanders and a special Berkut unit—whose five ex-members were tried for the murder of 48 Maidan protesters on Feb. 20, 2014 – are generally taken at face value. With some limited exceptions, challenges to this narrative are treated dismissively.

For the most part, mainstream news media in the U.S. and other Western countries ignored trial evidence, public statements by officials and politicians and scholarly studies that put the standard narrative under question. This includes non-reporting about my own academic studies of the Maidan massacre.

## **Killing Protesters and Police**

My work found that this was an organized mass killing of both protesters and the police, with the goal of delegitimizing the Yanukovich government and its forces and seizing power in Ukraine. Oligarchic and far right elements of the Maidan movement were involved in this massacre. For this reason, the official investigation was fabricated and stonewalled. I presented studies to support this as well as several [online video appendixes](#) with various evidence at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association in [San Francisco in 2015](#) and [Boston in 2018](#), the 2017 World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities in [New York in 2017](#), and a joint conference by the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University and the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies in 2018, and published their summary in an [academic press volume](#).

The prosecutor general of Ukraine recently announced that the investigation of the Maidan massacre is complete. He cited reconstructions of the Maidan massacre by a New York architecture company, working with a team of Ukrainian “volunteers” to provide a 3D model, as definite evidence that the Maidan protesters were massacred by the Berkut police and that snipers did not massacre the protesters.

This model was featured by *The New York Times*, in its May 30, 2018, report [“Who Killed the Kiev Protesters?”](#) as a proof that the Berkut police massacred Maidan protesters.

However, no expert knowledge or familiarity with the Maidan massacre or Ukraine is needed to see blatant misrepresentation of elementary data in that 3D model.

The wound locations of the killed Maidan protesters in [the 3D model](#) do not match the wound locations in the forensic medical examinations of the bodies. The reports of those examinations were used in this simulation to determine the locations of the shooters. They are published in Ukrainian and English on the linked website. According to one such [report](#), Ihor Dmytriv was shot in the “right side surface” and the “left side surface” of the torso “from the right to the left, from the top to the bottom, and a little from the front to the back” with the entry wound 20.5cm (8 inches) higher than the exit wound. However, in the simulation, his wounds have been moved to the front and the back and made nearly horizontal.

A Maidan lawyer [visually confirmed](#) at the Maidan massacre trial that these wounds locations of were in the right and left sides. In the [video](#) of their examination of Dmytriv right after his shooting, Maidan medics also indicate such locations of his wounds with no wounds visible in the front area, contrary to the 3D model. The forensic medical [reports](#) also state that Dmytriv was wounded in his right shoulder from bottom to top direction, with this entry wound 5 cm lower, but the 3D animation also misrepresents this direction.

The wound locations of the other two victims have been similarly altered. The 3D model moved the exit wound location from around the middle line of the back of Andriy Dyhdalovych’s body in [forensic medical and clothing examinations](#) significantly to the right. It also changed a similar large vertical angle from a top and bottom direction and 17 cm difference in height of entry and exit wounds to

nearly horizontal level.

In the case of Yuriy Parashchuk, forensic medical examinations found that his entry and exit wounds were in the back of his head on the left side. But the 3D analysis moved the entry wound location to the front area and changed its somewhat top-to-bottom direction to nearly horizontal. Frames from a video by a French photographer shows a large bullet hole in the back of Parashchuk's red helmet. How can he be shot in the back of his head by the Berkut police on a nearly similar horizontal level?

Changing the wound locations invalidates the entire reconstruction and, therefore, the conclusions of the SITU analysis and *The New York Times* article, that these and other Maidan protesters were shot from the Berkut positions.

One does not need to be a ballistic expert to see that locations of wounds in the back and on the sides and top-to-bottom directions of wounds specified in forensic medical reports and positions of these three killed protesters facing the Berkut in the videos cannot physically match with Berkut police positions located on a similar horizontal level on the ground in front of them. The forensic medical examinations conducted for the government investigation and made public at the Maidan massacre trial revealed that the absolute majority of the protesters were shot not in front and not from horizontal or near horizontal directions that are consistent with police positions. Rather, they were shot from a top-to-bottom direction and in sides or the back that are consistent with shooting from the Maidan-controlled buildings.



## Government Investigation

The government investigation, conducted after the Maidan government came to power after this massacre, and which charged the Berkut police behind the barricades with killing these three protesters, raises the same concerns.

The complex medical examinations, which were published on the SITU website and which are presented by the government investigation in Ukraine as a key evidence that the Berkut police massacred the protesters, showed the same bullet trajectories as the 3D model. The text of these examinations, which are available in Ukrainian and in English translations, shows that these bullet trajectories were determined not by ballistic experts but by medical experts without any calculations or explanations.

Synchronized videos, which were used by the SITU to determine that the Berkut police behind a truck barricade killed Parashchuk, actually show that he and other protesters were in a blind spot below the line of police fire from behind a truck. It was physically impossible for the police behind the wide and tall truck to shoot at him below over the top of this truck. Dozens of other Maidan protesters who were killed and wounded around the same spot were in the same situation.

The locations of the forces of the Yanukovich government during the massacre are well known, and they are identified in my studies, the government investigation charges, numerous videos, and in the SITU 3D model.

At the time of the killings of these three protesters, Berkut policemen were behind the barricades on Instytutska

Street on the government side, while the protesters who were killed were in between Berkut and the Hotel Ukraina.

Forensic examinations of bullet holes by government experts described numerous bullet holes on the second, third, and higher floors and the roof of the Hotel Ukraina on the side that faced the government forces. But they did not identify a single bullet hole on the first floor on the Berkut facing side of the hotel behind these protesters. Simple positioning of the bullet hole locations described in these forensic reports clearly shows that almost all bullets from the Berkut and other positions flew above the heads of the protesters there or targeted poles, trees, and a flower box. This is also shown in vide and photos – including some I took there after the massacre – and in videos and reports of shooting at journalists in the hotel with a Google Street View image from the first Berkut barricade.

This confirms my study findings that the special Berkut police unit and the Omega unit of snipers of Internal Troops were shooting at snipers in the Hotel Ukraina.

After five long years, the failure by the Poroshenko government's investigation to determine bullet trajectories by ballistic experts or conduct on-site investigative experiments for the same purpose – even after the Maidan massacre trial judges ordered them two years ago to do so – is therefore hardly surprising. It is impossible to bend physical reality. In a literal cover-up, large fences were recently erected on the crime scene for the construction of the Maidan massacre memorial, which would completely alter the landscape. The fences and the memorial would make it impossible to determine bullet trajectories on-site, which

still has not been done by the investigation for five years after this mass killing.

The SITU reconstruction also missed bullet holes that appeared in Dmytriv's shield and in a shield of another protester in front of Dyhdalovych in videos of their shooting that were used in the reconstruction. The locations of these bullet holes are inconsistent with shooting from the Berkut barricades.

But these shields with clear locations of the bullet holes, like the helmet of Parashchuk and almost all the shields and helmets of protesters who were killed or wounded, mysteriously disappeared after the massacre, along with a lot of other crucial evidence, such as bullets and security-camera footage.

Similarly, crucial testimonies of Maidan protesters, who witnessed the killings of Dyhdalovych and Dmytriv, are ignored by the *Times'* report, SITU and the official Ukrainian investigation. Dyhdalovych's wife stated in her Ukrainian media interview that another protester told her that he saw that Dyhdalovych was killed by a sniper on the roof of the Bank Arkada. This protester was filmed following Dyhdalovych when they both went to evacuate Dmytriv after he was shot. The Bank Arkada is a tall green building in the front and to the right of both Dyhdalovych and Dmytriv, and it appears to match the apparent directions of their wounds. My Maidan massacre studies video appendices showed that it was in the Maidan-controlled area and that snipers on its roof during the massacre were reported by both numerous Maidan protesters, including many wounded who spoke at the Maidan massacre trial and investigation, and by Security

Service of Ukraine commanders and snipers.

A female Maidan medic during the massacre was pointing to the top of this green building and shouting about snipers. But her words were translated in [a BBC report](#) as referring to six protesters killed by the snipers in that area. A [Maidan protester](#) and another [Maidan medic](#), who were wounded near the same spot where these two protesters were killed, both testified at the Maidan massacre trial that they were shot from this building. Government ballistic experts confirmed this during on-site investigative experiments.

### **Western Press Silence**

These revelations were not reported by any Western media. This includes *The New York Times*, which on April 5, 2014, [profiled](#) this wounded protester against the backdrop of an unquestioned report by the acting government in Kiev that blaming “former President Viktor F. Yanukovich, his riot police and their suspected Russian assistants for the violence that killed more than 100 people in Kiev in February.”

It also includes CNN, which [filmed](#) the shooting of this medic and attributed it to the government forces.

The government investigation simply denies that there were any snipers there and in other Maidan-controlled buildings, and refuses to investigate them. This is done despite [videos](#) of such snipers and testimonies of the absolute majority of wounded protesters at the trial and investigation and more than 150 other witnesses about snipers in these locations.

The assumption in the 3D model that Dmytriv was shot by the

single bullet is also contradicted by testimony of another protester who saw that Dmytriv was shot by “a sniper” from the Hotel Ukraina. My Maidan massacre studies and their video appendices showed that this hotel was then controlled by the Maidan forces.

*The New York Times* article described collaboration of the New York architecture firm with a Ukrainian “volunteer” in creating the 3D model. It did not report 2017 admissions by the prosecutor general of Ukraine on *Facebook* that his government agency funded the work of a group of anonymous “volunteers,” including this Ukrainian graduate student, in compiling and synchronizing various videos of the Maidan massacre in collaboration with a People’s Front party outlet.

Some of the People’s Front party leaders were accused by various Ukrainian politicians and Maidan activists, such as Nadia Savchenko, and by five ex-Georgian ex-military members in Italian and Israeli TV documentaries, of direct involvement in this massacre. Meanwhile, the *Times* lauds the Ukrainian government’s investigation and Maidan lawyers for drawing on such analyses by these “citizen investigators” and treats a New York architect firm as providing key evidence in the Maidan massacre trial.

Brad Samuels is a founding partner of Situ Research, the New York architecture company that produced the 3D model of the killing of three protesters, which was presented by the *Times* as proof that such snipers did not exist and that 49 protesters were massacred by the Berkut police.

Samuels said in a video [start at 55:16] that “...eventually,

there is a consensus that there was a third party acting. It is clear from forensic evidence that people were shot in the back. Somebody was shooting from rooftops.” His striking observation was not included anywhere in the SITU 3D model report that he produced. Nor was it reported by the *Times*.

Cases of protesters, who were shot in the back, were omitted from the SITU model. But even in the deliberately selected cases of the three protesters, who were presented by this simulation as shot in front, their actual wound locations suggest that they were also shot from a Maidan-controlled building, which was located in front and to the right of them.

There was not a single report in English-language media concerning [testimonies](#) at the Maidan massacre trial where 25 wounded Maidan protesters, with whose shootings Berkut policemen are charged, who stated that they were shot from Maidan-controlled buildings or areas.

Major outlets likewise neglected to cover the testimonies by 30 wounded protesters who said they witnessed snipers in those locations or were told about them by other protesters. This is stunning since these testimonies are publicly available in live online recordings of the Maidan massacre trial and they are complied with English-language subtitles into an [online video appendix](#) to my study. These testimonies represent the majority of wounded protesters with whose shooting Berkut was charged. They are consistent with video testimonies by about 100 witnesses in the [media and social media](#) and at the [trial and the investigation](#). But the official investigation in Ukraine simply denies that there were any such snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings, even

though the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine previously [stated](#) that snipers massacred many protesters from the Hotel Ukraina and other buildings.

Similarly, not a single media outlet reported segments of the *Belgian VRT News* video that showed Maidan protesters shouting during the massacre that they saw snipers in the Maidan-controlled Hotel Ukraina shooting Maidan protesters, pointing towards them, and asking them not to shoot. These segments were only shown to a small number of people at the Maidan massacre trial and are included in my [online video appendix](#) on *YouTube*. Other segments from this same video, however, were broadcast to some several hundred million viewers by major television networks in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, and Ukraine, and many other countries as evidence that the government forces massacred the Maidan protesters.

With the notable exception of an [Associated Press story quoting](#) the charismatic politician Nadia Savchenko, news agencies have ignored the [public remarks](#) of several Maidan politicians and activists who said that they witnessed the involvement of specific top Maidan leaders in the massacre.

Testimonies by five Georgian ex-military members in [Italian](#), [Israeli](#), Macedonian and Russian media and their published depositions to Berkut lawyers for the Maidan massacre trial have also been ignored. They stated that their groups received weapons, payments, and orders to massacre both police and protesters from specific Maidan and Georgian politicians.

They also said that they received instructions from a far-

right linked ex-U.S. Army sniper and then saw Georgian, Baltic States, and Right Sector-linked snipers shooting from specific Maidan-controlled buildings.

Western media silence also greeted a recent statement by Anatolii Hrytsenko, one of the top Ukrainian presidential candidates, who was also a Maidan politician and minister of defense, that the investigation of the massacre has been stonewalled because of the involvement of someone from the current leadership of Ukraine in this mass killing.

In contrast, there were no such testimonies admitting involvement in the massacre or knowledge of such involvement by the Berkut policemen, ex-police and security services commanders; nor by ex-Yanukovych government officials. No specific evidence of orders by then-president Yanukovych or his ministers and commanders to massacre unarmed protesters has been revealed by the trials, investigations or news reporting. Nonetheless, the Western mainstream media report existence of such orders as a matter of a fact.

Not a single major Western media reported that a forensic ballistic examination, conducted by government institute experts on the prosecution request with use of an automatic computer-based IBIS-TAIS system, determined that bullets extracted from killed protesters did not match a police database of bullet samples from Kalashnikov assault rifles of members of the entire Kyiv Berkut regiment. The latter included the special Berkut company charged with the massacre of the protesters. The same concerns the forensic examination findings that many protesters were killed with hunting bullets and pellets.



There are no Western media reports, at least in English, concerning the investigation by the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine. This investigation determined, based on protester's testimonies and investigative experiments, that almost half of the protesters (77 out of 157) were wounded on Feb. 20 from other sectors than the Berkut police and that no one was charged with their shooting.

A female Maidan medic, whose wounding on the Maidan was highly publicized by Western and Ukrainian media and politicians and attributed to government snipers, is one of them. Since the official investigation determined that government snipers did not massacre the Maidan protesters, with a single implausible exception announced recently, this implies that these protesters were wounded from the Maidan-controlled buildings and areas.

There was Western media silence, including from the *BBC*, about revelations by the Prosecutor General Office that one of the leaders of far right party Svoboda, who was also a member of the Ukrainian parliament at the time of the massacre, occupied a Hotel Ukraina room from which a sniper in Maidan-style green helmet was filmed by the *BBC* shooting in the direction of the Maidan protesters and the *BBC's* own journalists.

Similarly, there are no mainstream media reports of the visual examinations of bullet holes and their impact points by the government investigators that determined that one German ARD television room at the Hotel Ukraina was shot from the direction of the Main Post Office, which was at the time the headquarters of the Right Sector. The latter far-right group included radical nationalist and neo-Nazi

organizations and football ultras. This bullet just narrowly missed a German *ARD TV* female producer. The government investigators also determined that another *ARD* room in the same hotel was shot at from the Music Conservatory building, which was then the headquarters of the Right-Sector-linked special armed Maidan Self-Defense company.

Likewise, nothing was reported about a forensic ballistic examination made public at the trial that revealed that an [ABC News](#) producer was shot in his Hotel Ukraina room by a Winchester caliber hunting soft-point bullet that did not match a caliber of Berkut Kalashnikovs.

Misrepresentation of the Maidan massacre and its investigation by Western media and governments is puzzling.

American independence leader John Adams once defended the British soldiers charged with the Boston massacre in 1770. He regarded this defense as important for the rule of law to prevail over politics. He famously [stated](#) at the Boston massacre trial that “facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.” He not only won this politically charged case of a crucial massacre in U.S. politics and history but became U.S. president afterwards. The question is why this dictum is not heeded almost 250 years later in the case of the Maidan massacre in Ukraine.

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University of Toronto, and the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress. He received Ph.D. from the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. He is the author of “Cleft Countries: Regional Political Divisions and Cultures in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Moldova.”

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## UK Blurring Two Very Different Extradition Claims

The Swedish and U.S. claims are vastly different, writes Jonathan Cook. But the public conversation in the U.K. is simply about which has first dibs on Assange.

By **JonathanCook**

*Jonathan-Cook.net*



**I**n a previous blog post, I warned that the media and political class would continue with their long-running deceptions about Julian Assange now that he has been dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy. They have wasted no time in proving me right.

The first thrust in their campaign of deceit was set out on *The Guardian's* front page on Friday, April 12, the day after Assange was imprisoned.

There should have been wall-to-wall outrage from public figures in the U.K. at the United States creating a new crime of “doing journalism” and a new means of arrest for those committing this “crime” overseas, what I have termed “media rendition.”

Remember that all of the information contained in the U.S. charge sheet against Assange – the supposed grounds for his extradition – were known to the previous Obama administration as far back as 2010. But President Barack Obama never dared approve the current charges against Assange because legally there was no way to stop them being turned against “respectable” journalists, like those at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*.

This was the same Obama administration that had the worst record on prosecuting whistleblowers. Obama was no friend to investigative journalism but he understood that it would be unwise to so overtly subvert the notion of a free western press.

That the Trump administration has cast all this aside to get Assange behind bars should have every journalist in the world quaking in their boots, and loudly decrying what the U.S. is seeking to do.

And yet the reaction has been either quiet acceptance of the U.S. extradition request as a simple law enforcement measure or gentle mockery of Assange – that the scruffy outlaw dragged from the embassy was looking even scruffier after seven years of extreme house arrest and “arbitrary detention.” What a laugh!

### **Narrative Collusion**

Now we can see how the media is going to collude in a narrative crafted by the political class to legitimize what the Trump administration is doing.

Rather than focus on the gross violation of Assange’s

fundamental human rights, the wider assault on press freedoms and the attack on Americans' First Amendment Rights, U.K. politicians are "debating" whether the U.S. extradition claim on Assange should take priority over earlier Swedish extradition proceedings for a sexual-assault investigation that was publicly dropped back in 2017.

In other words, the public conversation in the U.K., sympathetically reported by *The Guardian*, supposedly Britain's only major liberal news outlet, is going to be about who has first dibs on Assange.

Here's the first paragraph of *The Guardian's* [front-page article](#):

"Political pressure is mounting on [Home Secretary] Sajid Javid to prioritise action that would allow Julian Assange to be extradited to Sweden, amid concerns that US charges relating to Wikileaks' activities risked overshadowing longstanding allegations of rape."

So, the concern is not that Assange is facing rendition to the U.S. It is that the U.S. claim might "overshadow" an outstanding legal case in Sweden.

The 70 MPs who signed the letter to Javid hope to kill two birds with one stone.

First, they are legitimizing the discourse of the Trump administration. This is no longer about an illegitimate U.S. extradition request on Assange we should all be loudly protesting. It is a competition between two legal claims, and a debate about which one should find legal remedy first.

It weighs a woman's sexual assault allegation against Assange and *WikiLeaks*' exposure of war crimes committed by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It suggests that both are in the same category, that they are similar potential crimes.

## Unequivocal Response



But there should only be one response to the U.S. extradition claim on Assange: It is entirely illegitimate. No debate. Anything less, any equivocation is to collude in the Trump administration's narrative.

The Swedish claim, if it is revived, is an entirely separate matter.

That *The Guardian* and the MPs are connecting the two should come as no surprise.

In another article on Assange last Friday, the *The Guardian*—echoing a common media refrain — reported as *fact* a demonstrably false claim: “Assange initially took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden.”

Assange and *WikiLeaks* always said that he entered the embassy to claim *political* asylum so as to avoid extradition to the U.S.

There could be no possible reason for its reporters to make

this elementary mistake other than that *The Guardian* is still waging its long-running campaign against Assange, the information revolution he represents and the challenge he poses to the corporate media of which *The Guardian* is a key part.

## **Seven Years of Derision**

For seven years the political and media establishments have been deriding the suggestion that Assange faced any threat from the U.S., despite the mounting private and public evidence that he did. Assange again has been proved conclusively right by current events, and they decisively wrong.

*The Guardian* knows that Assange did not need political asylum to avoid a sex case. So reporting this not as a *claim* by his detractors but as an indisputable *fact* is simple, Trump-supporting propaganda meant to discredit Assange – propaganda that happily treats any damage to the cause of journalism as collateral damage.

Second, the only major politicians prepared to highlight the threats to Assange's personal rights and wider press freedoms posed by the U.S. extradition request are opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his ally, Diane Abbott, the Labour shadow home secretary. They have rightly noted that the U.S. is using the extradition demand to silence Assange and intimidate any other journalists who might think about digging up evidence of the crimes committed by the U.S. national security state.

Abbott commented last Friday that Assange's current arrest was not about "the rape charges, serious as they are, it is

about *WikiLeaks* and all of that embarrassing information about the activities of the American military and security services that was made public.”

Abbott has faced a storm of criticism for her statement, accused of not giving enough weight to the Swedish case. In fact, her only mistake was to give it more weight than it currently deserves. She spoke of “rape charges,” but there are in fact no such charges. (Additionally, although the case is classed broadly as a rape allegation in Sweden, in the U.K. it would be classed at most as sexual assault. Forgotten too is that the evidence was considered too weak by the original prosecutor to bring any charges, Assange was allowed to leave Sweden and the investigation was dropped.)

### **Assange Did Not Flee Questioning**

Rather, Assange was previously wanted for questioning, and has never been charged with anything. If the Swedish extradition request is revived, it will be so that he can be questioned about those allegations. I should also point out, as almost no one else is, that Assange did not “flee” questioning. He offered Swedish prosecutors to question him at the embassy.

Even though questioning overseas in extradition cases is common – Sweden has done it dozens of times – Sweden repeatedly refused in Assange’s case, leading the Swedish appeal court to criticize the prosecutors. When he was finally questioned after four years of delays, Swedish prosecutors violated his rights by refusing access to his Swedish lawyer.



Further, the MPs and media getting exercised that Assange “took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden” are forgetting that he did not object to extradition as long as he received a promise that he would not then be extradited on to the U.S. Sweden refused to offer such assurances. We can now see only too clearly that Assange had every reason to insist on such assurances.

I don’t have space here to analyze the Swedish case on this occasion (that’s maybe for another time), though it is worth briefly noting that most of the problematic details of the case have been disappeared down the memory hole.

Given that the political and media class are still speaking in terms of “charges,” rather than questions about allegations, we should recall that there were glaring problems with the evidence in the Swedish case. Not least, the key piece of evidence against Assange – a torn condom produced by the woman – was found to contain not a trace of DNA from either Assange or from her.

Those at the forefront of the attacks on Abbott and Corbyn, echoed by *The Guardian*, are the same Blairite Labour MPs who have been trying to oust Corbyn as Labour party leader, despite his twice being elected overwhelmingly by the membership.

These MPs, who dominate the Labour parliamentary party, have spent the past four years focusing on smears that Labour is “institutionally anti-Semitic” in an obvious effort to terminally wound Corbyn. Now they have found another possible route to achieve the same end.

They are suggesting that Corbyn and Abbott are disregarding

the Swedish woman's right to justice. The clear subtext of their arguments is that the pair are rape apologists.

As I have pointed out, Abbott has actually overstated the current status of the Swedish case, not sidelined it at all.

But what Corbyn and Abbott have done is to make a clear political, legal and moral demarcation between the Swedish case, which must be resolved according to accepted legal principles, and the U.S. extradition, which has no legal or moral merit whatsoever.

What these U.K. MPs and *The Guardian* have done in this front-page story is muddy the waters yet further, with enthusiastic disregard for the damage it might do to Assange's rights, to Corbyn's leadership and to the future of truth-telling journalism.

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

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## ROBERT PARRY: All Investigative Journalists Do What Julian Assange Did

The U.S. has indicted Julian Assange for encouraging his source to give more information and for trying to protect his source's identity, what all journalist routinely do, said one of the greatest investigative journalists of our time.

*Parry is writing here about the Obama administration's attempt to indict Assange for simply doing what all*

*investigative journalists, including Parry, do all the time: namely encourage their sources to turn over secret information even if the sources have to break the law to do so. While the Obama DOJ eventually decided against indictment because it would cross the red line of criminalizing journalism, the Trump administration has crossed that very line on the very same evidence the Obama administration rejected. This is an especially prescient and relevant article from the late founder of **Consortium News**, written just eight months after the release of the Collateral Murder video.*

**By Robert Parry**

*Special to Consortium News*

***First published Dec. 16, 2010.***



Whatever the unusual aspects of the case, the Obama administration's reported plan to indict WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for conspiring with Army Pvt. Bradley Manning to obtain U.S. secrets strikes at the heart of investigative journalism on national security scandals.

That's because the process for reporters obtaining classified information about crimes of state most often involves a journalist persuading some government official to break the law either by turning over classified documents or at least by talking about the secret information. There is almost always some level of "conspiracy" between reporter and source.

Contrary to what some outsiders might believe, it's actually quite uncommon for sensitive material to simply arrive "over

the transom" unsolicited. Indeed, during three decades of reporting on these kinds of stories, I can only recall a few secret documents arriving that way to me.

In most cases, I played some role – either large or small – in locating the classified information or convincing some government official to divulge some secrets. More often than not, I was the instigator of these "conspiracies."

My "co-conspirators" typically were well-meaning government officials who were aware of some wrongdoing committed under the cloak of national security, but they were never eager to put their careers at risk by talking about these offenses. I usually had to persuade them, whether by appealing to their consciences or by constructing some reasonable justification for them to help.

Other times, I was sneaky in liberating some newsworthy classified information from government control. Indeed, in 1995, *Consortiumnews.com* was started as a way to publish secret and top-secret information that I had discovered in the files of a closed congressional inquiry during the chaotic period between the Republicans winning the 1994 elections and their actual takeover of Congress in early 1995.

In December 1994, I asked for and was granted access to supposedly unclassified records left behind by a task force that had looked into allegations that Ronald Reagan's campaign had sabotaged President Jimmy Carter's hostage negotiations with Iran in 1980.

To my surprise, I discovered that the investigators, apparently in their haste to wrap up their work, had failed

to purge the files of all classified material. So, while my “minder” wasn’t paying attention to me, I ran some of the classified material through a copier and left with it in a folder. I later wrote articles about these documents and posted some on the Internet.

Such behavior – whether cajoling a nervous government official to expose a secret or exploiting some unauthorized access to classified material – is part of what an investigative journalist does in covering national security abuses. The traditional rule of thumb has been that it’s the government’s job to hide the secrets and a reporter’s job to uncover them.

**“The process for reporters obtaining classified information about crimes of state most often involves a journalist persuading some government official to break the law either by turning over classified documents or at least by talking about the secret information. There is almost always some level of ‘conspiracy’ between reporter and source.”**

In the aftermath of significant leaks, the government often tries to convince news executives to spike or water down the stories “for the good of the country.” But it is the news organization’s ultimate decision whether to comply or to publish.

Historically, most of these leaks have caused the government some short-term embarrassment (although usually accompanied

by exaggerated howls of protests). In the long run, however, the public has been served by knowing about some government abuse. Reforms often follow as they did during the Iran-Contra scandal that I was involved in exposing in the 1980s.

## **A Nixon Precedent**

Yet, in the WikiLeaks case – instead of simply complaining and moving on – the Obama administration appears to be heading in a direction not seen since the Nixon administration sought to block the publication of the Pentagon Papers secret history of the Vietnam War in 1971.

In doing so, the Obama administration, which came to power vowing a new era of openness, is contemplating a novel strategy for criminalizing traditional journalistic practices, while trying to assure major U.S. news outlets that they won't be swept up in the Assange-Manning dragnet.

**Honor Bob Parry's legacy by donating to our Spring Fund Drive.**

*The New York Times* reported on Thursday that federal prosecutors were reviewing the possibility of indicting Assange on conspiracy charges for allegedly encouraging or assisting Manning in extracting “classified military and State Department files from a government computer system.”

The *Times* article by Charlie Savage notes that if prosecutors determine that Assange provided some help in the process, “they believe they could charge him as a conspirator in the leak, not just as a passive recipient of the documents who then published them.

“Among materials prosecutors are studying is an online chat log in which Private Manning is said to claim that he had been directly communicating with Mr. Assange using an encrypted Internet conferencing service as the soldier was downloading government files. Private Manning is also said to have claimed that Mr. Assange gave him access to a dedicated server for uploading some of them to WikiLeaks.

“Adrian Lamo, an ex-hacker in whom Private Manning confided and who eventually turned him in, said Private Manning detailed those interactions in instant-message conversations with him. He said the special server’s purpose was to allow Private Manning’s submissions to ‘be bumped to the top of the queue for review.’ By Mr. Lamo’s account, Private Manning bragged about this ‘as evidence of his status as the high-profile source for WikiLeaks.’”

Though some elements of this suspected Assange-Manning collaboration may be technically unique because of the Internet’s role – and that may be a relief to more traditional news organizations like the *Times*, which has published some of the WikiLeaks documents – the underlying reality is that what WikiLeaks has done is essentially “the same wine” of investigative journalism in “a new bottle” of the Internet.

**“In most cases, I played some role – either large or small – in locating the classified information or convincing some government official to divulge some secrets. More often than not, I was the instigator of these**

## **“conspiracies.”**

By shunning *WikiLeaks* as some deviant journalistic hybrid, mainstream U.S. news outlets may breathe easier now but may find themselves caught up in a new legal precedent that could be applied to them later.

As for the Obama administration, its sudden aggressiveness in divining new “crimes” in the publication of truthful information is especially stunning when contrasted with its “see no evil” approach toward openly acknowledged crimes committed by President George W. Bush and his subordinates, including major offenses such as torture, kidnapping and aggressive war.

### **Holder’s Move**

The possibility of an indictment of Assange no longer seems to me like rampant paranoia. Initially, I didn’t believe that the Obama administration was serious in stretching the law to find ways to prosecute Assange and to shut down *WikiLeaks*.

But then there was the pressure on *WikiLeaks*’ vendors such as Amazon.com and PayPal along with threats from prominent U.S. political figures, spouting rhetoric about Assange as a “terrorist” comparable to Osama bin Laden and a worthy target of assassination.

Normally, when people engage in such talk of violence, they are the ones who attract the attention of police and prosecutors. In this case, however, the Obama administration appears to be bowing to those who talk loosely about murdering a truth-teller.



Attorney General Eric Holder announced last week that he has taken “significant” steps in the investigation, a possible reference to what an Assange lawyer said he had learned from Swedish authorities about a secret grand jury meeting in Northern Virginia.

The *Times* reported, “Justice Department officials have declined to discuss any grand jury activity. But in interviews, people familiar with the case said the department appeared to be attracted to the possibility of prosecuting Mr. Assange as a co-conspirator to the leaking because it is under intense pressure to make an example of him as a deterrent to further mass leaking of electronic documents over the Internet.

**“By shunning *WikiLeaks* as some deviant journalistic hybrid, mainstream U.S. news outlets may breathe easier now but may find themselves caught up in a new legal precedent that could be applied to them later.”**

“By bringing a case against Mr. Assange as a conspirator to Private Manning’s leak, the government would not have to confront awkward questions about why it is not also prosecuting traditional news organizations or investigative journalists who also disclose information the government says should be kept secret – including *The New York Times*, which also published some documents originally obtained by WikiLeaks.”

In other words, the Obama administration appears to be singling out Assange as an outlier in the journalistic

community who is already regarded as something of a pariah. In that way, mainstream media personalities can be invited to join in his persecution without thinking that they might be next.

Though American journalists may understandably want to find some protective cover by pretending that Julian Assange is not like us, the reality is – whether we like it or not – we are all Julian Assange.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. He founded Consortiumnews in 1995.

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## 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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# 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](http://Jonathan-Cook.net)



**F**or 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/>.**

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## British Foreign Policy in the Middle East: A Secret History of Self Interest

The idea that Westminster is the “mother of all parliaments,” representing a democratic model for the world, is a cultivated myth, writes Mark Curtis.

By **Mark Curtis**

*British Foreign Policy Declassified*



On Tuesday in the British parliament, Labour's shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry asked an urgent question relating to allegations that British troops have been covertly fighting in Yemen and supporting the Saudi-led coalition.

As **reported** in the *Mail* on Sunday, five British special forces troops from the elite Special Boat Service (SBS) were injured while "advising" Saudi Arabia on their deadly campaign in Yemen.

The commandos were injured in gun fights as part of a top-secret campaign, and other reports have claimed British troops have been killed in such battles. British soldiers from the Special Air Service (SAS) have **reportedly** been secretly deployed and operate "dressed in Arab clothing."

Responding to Labour's questions, Mark Field, a minister in the U.K.'s foreign office, said that he would seek to get to the bottom of these **"very serious and well sourced"** allegations.

The presence of British soldiers in Yemen, secretly fighting a war that has brought death, famine and destruction to millions of innocent civilians, raises an age-old question: why does British foreign policy in the Middle East support dictatorships, abuse human rights and prioritize Britain's power status?

It's tempting to say the reasons are simply geopolitics, oil and other commercial interests. But there is a deeper

explanation: Britain, far from being a true democracy, is in reality an oligarchy that promotes the interests of a privileged domestic elite. The idea that Westminster is the “mother of all parliaments,” representing a democratic model for the world, is a cultivated myth.

## **An Elite Few**

The U.K. has elections every five years, an independent judiciary, freedom of speech and association, and strong laws protecting the equality of all citizens and civil liberties. Yet real power rests in the hands of an elite few who control policy-making institutions and the dominant ideas in society.

British foreign policy-making is so centralized that it is akin to an authoritarian regime. A prime minister can send troops into action without even consulting parliament.

Britain is currently fighting several covert wars with no parliamentary authorization or debate. Away from Yemen, special forces are operating on the ground in Syria, despite parliament only having approved air strikes against the Islamic State (IS) group. The British covert war in Syria has been going on since 2011, with almost no discussion by elected MPs.

In 1976, Lord Hailsham famously termed the U.K. an “elective dictatorship” because parliament is easily dominated by the government of the day and faces few constraints on its power. But this was before former prime minister Margaret Thatcher centralized decision-making still further, regularly bypassing the cabinet and relying on a small set of advisers – a strategy continued by Tony Blair, leading to



the disastrous invasion of Iraq.

While the government is saying it will look into the role the British military is playing in Yemen, the stock response to parliamentary questions on U.K. covert action tends to be: “For reasons of national security, it is the longstanding policy of successive British governments not to comment on intelligence and sensitive operations.”

Even minor information is withheld on “sensitive” subjects: when MP Alex Sobel asked the government last month how much the U.S. reimburses Britain for the costs of the defense ministry police at the spy base at Menwith Hill in Yorkshire, a government minister refused to say.

Even when asked parliamentary questions on overt foreign policy, ministerial responses tend to be minimalist, and are often misleading or deceitful. Anyone who has made a Freedom of Information request to the government will know that they are routinely denied on the pretext of protecting “national security.”

### **Operating with Impunity**

Neither Blair nor former Prime Minister David Cameron has been held to account for the disastrous wars in Iraq or Libya. The British political system is so extreme that no minister has, to my knowledge, been held to account for crimes abroad – despite numerous wars, covert operations, coups and involvement in human rights abuses.

In Yemen, the U.K.-supported Saudi military has for four years been engaged in war crimes, over which British ministers have acted with impunity.

Government policies are meant to be scrutinized by all-party parliamentary committees, but they rarely hold the government to account. They tend to be packed with government supporters who fail to investigate key policies or grill ministers.

In the U.K.'s "mainstream" media, many key British foreign policies are not covered at all. There are perilously few articles reporting the extent of U.K. support for Israel or the Sisi regime in Egypt.

Even the war in Yemen has been little scrutinized; there is criticism of U.K. arms exports, but little if any mention of the air force maintaining Saudi warplanes and storing and issuing the bombs for their use. The *Mail's* Sunday report on covert British action in Yemen is a revelation partly because such coverage is so infrequent.

Although mainstream articles do reveal aspects of U.K. foreign policy, it is more typical for reporting and commentary to amplify the policies of the state or to spread disinformation. False assumptions pervade the media, such as that U.K. policy in the Middle East is based on support for democracy and human rights.

The 1953 Anglo-American coup in Iran was about maintaining the interests of oil firms – in Britain's case, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Corporation, the forerunner of BP. Fifty years later, the 2003 invasion of Iraq was also mainly about oil, as was the 2011 war in Libya.

The U.K.'s support of Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi regime appears to be mainly about oil and gas interests in the country. The special relationship with Saudi Arabia seeks to

promote BAE Systems and other large arms corporations.

The extensive revolving door of personnel between government and corporations plays a key role in ensuring that elite interests are aligned. David Omand, the former GCHQ director, went on to work for the arms corporation [Babcock](#); General David Richards, the former army chief of staff, was tapped to chair the U.K. advisory board of the U.S. arms corporation [DynCorp](#); and John Sawers, the former director of MI6, was appointed a non-executive director of [BP](#), among other examples.

## **Private Club**

In some ways, Britain resembles more a private club than a country. As author Adam Ramsay has [noted](#), only five British universities have produced a prime minister, and more than twice as many have gone to Eton as to non-fee paying schools.

It is striking that there have been so few whistle-blowers revealing secrets about U.K. foreign policy. This is probably because those allowed access to the elite normally come from the same circles and can be relied on to be one of the chaps forever.

The very top of the U.K.'s privilege system – members of the royal family – are regularly deployed by the foreign office and ministry of defense to support U.K. policy and military interests abroad.

Royal visits help to build relations with key regimes and sell more arms to the Middle East. The system is built on patronage, highlighted by the House of Lords, a medieval

anachronism that is packed full of appointees of the government.

There are few signs that British oligarchy will change anytime soon. The “permanent government” in Whitehall is deeply entrenched. The main challenger to traditional U.K. foreign policies – Jeremy Corbyn – is being attacked and undermined on all sides. But it is not clear that even Corbyn intends to challenge British oligarchy.

There is a real need for a transformation away from centralized, unaccountable governance to a system that is much more participatory, and where citizens are informed and empowered, something that would change both domestic and foreign policies. This would benefit not only Britons, but the Middle Easterners on the receiving end of British policies.

**Mark Curtis is an historian and analyst of U.K. foreign policy and international development and the author of six books, the latest being an updated edition of “Secret Affairs: Britain’s CollU.S. ion with Radical Islam.”**

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## A Year of Silencing Julian Assange

On this date in 2018, the Wikileaks publisher was cut off from the work of journalism, reports Elizabeth Vos.

By [Elizabeth Vos](#)

## *Special to Consortium News*



One year ago Thursday, Ecuador's government under President Lenin Moreno silenced Julian Assange.

WikiLeaks wrote on [Twitter](#) Wednesday: "... March 28, marks one year that *WikiLeaks* publisher Julian Assange has been illegally gagged from doing journalism—any writing that expresses a 'political opinion'? even on his own treatment, after pressure from the U.S. on Ecuador."

On this date in 2018 Moreno imposed on Assange what Human Rights Watch's legal counsel Dinah Pokempner [described](#) as looking "more and more like solitary confinement." Moreno cut off Assange's online access and restricted visitors to the Ecuador embassy in London where Assange has had legal political asylum since 2012.

Moreno cited Assange's critical social media remarks about Ecuador's allies, the U.S. and Spain. Assange's near-total isolation, with the exception of visits from legal counsel during week days, has been augmented by the Ecuadorian government's imposition of a complex ["protocol,"](#) which, although eased slightly in recent months in respect of visits allowed, has not improved Assange's overall status over the last 12 months. In some respects, it seems to have worsened.

*WikiLeaks'* [Courage Foundation](#) described the terms of the protocol:

"Explicit threats to revoke Julian's asylum if he, or any

visitors, breach or are perceived to breach, any of the 28 'rules' in the protocol. The 'protocol' forbids Julian from undertaking journalism and expressing his opinions, under threat of losing his asylum. The rules also state that the embassy can seize Julian's property or his visitors' property and hand these to the UK police, and report visitors to the UK authorities. The protocol also requires visitors to provide the IMEI codes and serial numbers of electronic devices used inside the embassy, and states that this private information may be shared with undisclosed agencies."

The protocol does not spell out all the restrictions imposed on Assange and his supporters over the last year. A bombshell report by [Cassandra Fairbanks](#) on Tuesday revealed Ecuador's demand that Assange and his lawyer be scanned before entering a "highly bugged and monitored" conference room with a journalist.

Describing her experience, Fairbanks said she had been: "Locked in a cold, surveilled room for over an hour by Ecuadorian officials, as a furious argument raged between the country's ambassador and Julian Assange."

The argument reportedly centered on Assange's refusal to submit to a body scan in order to enter the conference room, where Fairbanks waited. Fairbanks [reported](#) that Assange shouted at the Ecuadorian ambassador, accusing the latter of acting as an agent of the United States government. The ambassador then told Assange to "shut up," she reported.

*WikiLeaks*, writing via social media, has [confirmed](#) the "factual elements" of Fairbanks' story.

## Subject to Body Scans

Assange and his lawyers are now subjected to body scans in addition to conditions that, in the opinion of Ecuador's former President [Rafael Correa](#), already amounted to torture. In his argument with the ambassador, Assange protested that he was being treated like "a prisoner" and not a political asylee.

Assange's supporters have claimed that rather than risk a public-relations fallout by removing Assange from the embassy by force, the U.S., UK and Ecuador are acting to hasten Assange's physical and mental demise in hopes he will be forced to leave the embassy or become incapacitated.

*WikiLeaks'* new Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson told *RT* in a [televised interview](#): "We, of course, know that Lenin Moreno in Ecuador is willing to sacrifice Julian Assange for debt relief, that was reported by *The New York Times* in early December."

The [Courage Foundation](#) summarized Assange's plight:

"Julian Assange is the only publisher and journalist in the EU formally found to be arbitrarily detained by the UN human rights system. He is in dire circumstances, faces imminent termination of his asylum, extradition and life in a US prison for publishing the truth about US wars, and has been gagged and isolated since 28 March 2018. He has been kept in the UK from his young family in France for eight years (where he lived before being arbitrarily detained in the UK), has not seen the sun for almost seven years, and has been found by the United Nations to be

subjected to “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.”

On Thursday Ecuador’s foreign minister threatened additional “‘firm and sustained’ measures against Assange after [@WikiLeaks](#) reports on the [@INAPapers](#) offshore scandal involving the president and his brother,” [WikiLeaks tweeted](#).

Since Assange was cut off from the outside world, efforts by the United States to prosecute Assange and *WikiLeaks* have been exposed. That Assange had already been charged was inadvertently [revealed](#) by a cut-and-paste error by the U.S. attorney’s office of the Eastern District of Virginia. The [prosecution](#) of the publisher pertains to *WikiLeaks*’ Chelsea Manning-era publications, and possibly Vault 7, not to the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

### **Manning Back in Jail**

Thursday also marks the passage of Manning’s third week of imprisonment for her refusal to testify before a grand jury convened to prosecute *WikiLeaks* and Assange. Since being jailed, Manning’s supporters have [reported](#) that she has been kept in solitary confinement, where she will remain indefinitely until either the grand jury is disbanded or she agrees to testify without legal counsel and under a veil of secrecy.

Presumably, prosecutors hope to coerce Manning to backtrack on her testimony during her court-martial in 2013, in which she testified she acted alone, and instead indicate that Assange worked to incite or aid her in retrieving leaked material. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist [Chris Hedges](#) described the situation as “the new inquisition.”



The end of the collusion conspiracy theory came as a victory for Assange and WikiLeaks. Special Counsel Robert Mueller made it clear there would be no indictments against either for their roles during the 2016 election.

However, the damage has been significant, with Assange unable to comment and WikiLeaks saddled with residual, unresolved smears. Over the last three years, cable news pundits endlessly vilified *WikiLeaks* and Assange by claiming the publisher coordinated with the Trump presidential campaign and became an instrument of the Kremlin in 2016.

Meanwhile, *The Guardian* has allowed its outlandish story alleging that secret meetings took place between Assange and Paul Manafort in Ecuador's London embassy three times between 2013 and 2016 to go un-retracted and unexplained. WikiLeaks has called the story "an intentional front page fabrication," and launched a Gofundme campaign to raise funds to sue the newspaper. Hrafnsson confirmed the lawsuit is progressing.

On March 28 last year, friends and supporters of Assange spontaneously came together on hearing the news that he had been cut off from the outside world by the Ecuadorian government. For more than 10 hours, participants and viewers from across the planet raised their voices to protest the injustice of Assange having been gagged.

The initial "Reconnect Julian" event led to subsequent "Unity4J" vigils. Over the past 12 months, demonstrations of support have unfolded across the globe, including many events organized by the Socialist Equality Party and a plethora of unaffiliated actions in solidarity with Assange.

The *WikiLeaks* founder's mother, Christine Assange, wrote via [social media](#): "At critical times throughout history, leaders have emerged to lead the fight for freedom. They risk their lives and liberty to do so. Most of us don't have their courage, but we can unite to protect them. [#FreeAssange](#) [#FreeManning](#)"

Earlier Thursday, [trucks](#) emblazoned with supportive messages for Assange and Manning appeared in [London](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#)

**Elizabeth Vos is a freelance journalist and contributor to Consortium News.**

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## The Notable Silence of Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill

In a strangely old-school, Catholic, sense, they chose not to look back or question the assassinations of the 1960s, writes Edward Curtin.

**By Edward Curtin**

[edwardcurtin.com](#)



**G**rowing up Irish-Catholic in the Bronx in the 1960s, I was an avid reader of the powerful columns of Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill in the New York newspapers.

These guys were extraordinary wordsmiths. They would grab you by the collar and drag you into the places and faces of those they wrote about. Passion infused their reports. They were never boring. They made you laugh and cry as they transported you into the lives of real people. You knew they had actually gone out into the streets of the city and talked to people. All kinds of people: poor, rich, black, white, high-rollers, lowlifes, politicians, athletes, mobsters – they ran the gamut. You could sense they loved their work, that it enlivened them as it enlivened you the reader. Their words sung and crackled and breathed across the page. They left you always wanting more, wondering sometimes how true it all was, so captivating were their storytelling abilities.

They cut through abstractions to connect individuals to major events such as the Vietnam War, the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, the Central Park jogger case, AIDS. They were spokesmen for the underdogs, the abused, the confused and the bereft. They relentlessly attacked the abuses and hypocrisies of the powerful.

They became celebrities as a result of their writing. Breslin ran for New York City Council president along with Norman Mailer for mayor with the slogan “No More Bullshit.” Breslin appeared in beer and cereal commercials. Hamill dated Jacqueline Kennedy and the actress Shirley MacLaine. Coming out of poor and struggling Irish-Catholic families in Queens and Brooklyn respectively, they became acclaimed in NYC and around the country. As a result, they were befriended by the rich and powerful with whom they

hobnobbed.

HBO has recently released a fascinating documentary about the pair: "Breslin and Hamill." It brings them back in all their gritty glory to the days when New York was another city, a city of newspapers and typewriters and young passion still hopeful that despite the problems and national tragedies, there were still fighters who would bang out a message of hope and defiance in the mainstream press. It was a time before money and propaganda devoured journalism and a deadly pall descended on the country as the economic elites expanded their obscene control over people's lives and the media.

### **Irish Wake**

So, it is also fitting that this documentary feels like an Irish wake with two wheelchair-bound old men musing on the past and all that has been lost and what approaching death has in store for them and all they love. While not a word is spoken about the Catholic faith of their childhoods with its death-defying consolation, it sits between them like a skeleton. We watch and listen to two men, once big in all ways, shrink before our eyes. I was reminded of a novel Breslin wrote long ago: "World Without End, Amen," a title taken directly from a well-known Catholic prayer. Endings, the past receding, a lost world, aching hearts and the unspoken yearning for more life.

Hamill, especially, wrote columns that were beautifully elegiac, and his words in this documentary also sound that sense despite his efforts to remain hopeful. The film is a nostalgia trip. Breslin, who died in 2017, tries hard to

maintain the bravado that was his hallmark, but a deep sadness and bewilderment seeps through his face, the mask of indomitability that once served him well gone in the end.

So, while young people need to know about these two old-school reporters and their great work in this age of insipidity and pseudo-objectivity, this film is probably not a good introduction. Their writing would serve this purpose better.

### **Assassination Investigations**

This documentary is appearing at an interesting time when a large group of prominent Americans, including Robert Kennedy Jr. and his sister Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, are calling for new investigations into the assassinations of the 1960s, murders that Breslin and Hamill covered and wrote about. Both men were in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in 1968. They were friends of the senator and it was Hamill who wrote to RFK and helped persuade him to run.

Breslin was in the Audubon Ballroom when Malcolm X was assassinated. He wrote an iconic and highly original article about the JFK assassination. Hamill wrote a hard-hitting piece about RFK's murder, describing Sirhan Sirhan quite harshly, while presuming his guilt. They covered and wrote about all the assassinations of that era. Breslin also wrote a famous piece about John Lennon's murder. They wrote these articles quickly, in the heat of the moment, on deadline.

But they did not question the official versions of these assassinations. Not then, nor in the 50-plus years since.

Nor in this documentary. In fact, in the film Hamill talks about five shots being fired at RFK from the front by Sirhan Sirhan who was standing there. Breslin utters not a word. Yet it is well known that RFK was shot from the rear at point-blank range and that no bullets hit him from the front. The official autopsy confirmed this. Robert Kennedy Jr. asserts that his father was not shot by Sirhan but by a second gunman. It's as though Hamill is stuck in time and his personal memories of the event; as though he were too close to things and never stepped back and studied the evidence that has emerged. Why, only he could say.

### **Too Close to the Events**

Perhaps both men were too close to the events and the people they covered. Their words always took you to the scene and made you feel the passion of it all, the shock, the drama, the tragedy, the pain, the confusion, and all that was irretrievably lost in murders that changed this country forever, killings that haunt the present in incalculable ways. Jimmy and Pete made us feel the deep pain and shock of being overwhelmed with grief. They were masters of this art.

But the view from the street is not that of history. Deadlines are one thing; analysis and research another. Breslin and Hamill wrote for the moment, but they have lived a half century after those moments, decades during which the evidence for these crimes has accumulated to indict powerful forces in the U.S. government. No doubt this evidence came to their attention, but they have chosen to ignore it, whatever their reasons. Why these champions of the afflicted have disregarded this evidence is

perplexing. As one who greatly admires their work, I am disappointed by this failure.

Street journalism has its limitations. It needs to be placed in a larger context. Our world is indeed without end and the heat of the moment needs the coolness of time. The bird that dives to the ground to seize a crumb of bread returns to the treetop to survey the larger scene. Breslin and Hamill stuck to the ground where the bread lay.

At one point in "Breslin and Hamill," the two good friends talk about how well they were taught to write by the nuns in their Catholic grammar schools. "Subject, verb, object, that was the story of the whole thing," says Breslin. Hamill replies, "Concrete nouns, active verbs." "It was pretty good teaching," adds Breslin. And although neither went to college (probably a saving grace), they learned those lessons well and gifted us with so much gritty and beautiful writing and reporting.

Yet like the nuns who taught them, they had their limitations, and what was written once was not revisited and updated. In a strange, very old-school Catholic sense, it was the eternal truth, rock solid, and not to be questioned. Unspeakable and anathema: the real killers of the Kennedys and the others. The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 as well.

When my mother was very old, she published her only piece of writing. It was very Breslin and Hamill-like and was published in a Catholic magazine. She wrote how, when she was a young girl and the streets of New York were filled with horse-drawn wagons, the nuns in her grammar school

chose her to leave school before lunch and go to a neighboring bakery to buy rolls for their lunch. It was considered a big honor and she was happy to get out of school for the walk to the bakery she chose a few streets away. She got the rolls and was walking back with them when some boys jostled her and all the rolls fell into the street, rolling through horse shit. She panicked, but picked up the rolls and cleaned them off. Shaking with fear, she then brought them to the convent and handed them to a nun. After lunch, she was called to the front of the room by her teacher, the nun who had chosen her to buy them. She felt like she would faint with fear. The nun sternly looked at her. "Where did you buy those rolls?" she asked. In a halting voice she told her the name of the bakery. The sister said, "They were delicious. We must always shop in that bakery."

Of course, the magazine wouldn't publish the words "horse shit." The editor found a nice way to avoid the truth and eliminate horse shit. And the nuns were happy.

Yet bullshit seems much harder to erase, despite slogans and careful editors, or perhaps because of them. Sometimes silence is the real bullshit, and how do you eliminate that?

**Ed Curtin teaches sociology at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. His writing on varied topics has appeared widely over many years. He states: "I write as a public intellectual for the general public, not as a specialist for a narrow readership. I believe a noncommittal sociology is an impossibility and therefore see all my work as an effort to enhance human freedom through understanding." His website is <http://edwardcurtin.com>.**



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## Dismantling the Doomsday Machines

Dan Ellsberg has given us a book that shows the urgency of re-engaging on nuclear disarmament, writes John V. Walsh.

# With Two Minutes to Midnight, Time Is Running Out

**By John V. Walsh**

[Anti-war.com](http://Anti-war.com)

*"From a technical point of view, he [director Stanley Kubrick] anticipated many things. ... Since that time, little has changed, honestly. The only difference is that modern weapons systems have become more sophisticated, more complex. But this idea of a retaliatory strike and the inability to manage these systems, yes, all of these things are relevant today. It [controlling the weapons] will become even more difficult and more dangerous."*

*– Russian President Vladimir Putin commenting on the film, "Dr. Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb," in an [interview with Oliver Stone, May 11, 2016](#). Putin had not seen the movie and did not know of it before Stone showed it to him.*

The ["Doomsday Machine,"](#) the title of [Daniel Ellsberg's](#) superb book, is not an imaginary contraption from a movie masterpiece. A Doomsday Machine uncannily like the one described in "Dr. Strangelove" exists right now. In fact,

there are two such machines, one in U.S. hands and one in Russia's. The U.S. seeks to hide its version, but Ellsberg has revealed that it has existed since the 1950s. Russia has quietly admitted that it has one, named it formally, "Perimetr," and also tagged it with a frighteningly apt nickname "Dead Hand." Because the U.S. and Russia are the only nations with Doomsday Machines to date we shall restrict this discussion to them.

Ellsberg's terrifying message in the book has failed to provoke action in the year since its publication. Instead, on Jan. 24 the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* kept its [Doomsday Clock](#) at two minutes to midnight, poised perilously close to Armageddon for a second year, marking a "new abnormal."

The first component of a Doomsday Machine is a mechanism of launching nuclear weapons with a command structure not always in the hands of a president in either country, something carefully hidden from the U.S. public.

The second component is a weapon of such destructive force that it can kill billions at once and then more gradually the entire human race and perhaps all animal life on earth.

Here is a brief consideration of Ellsberg's views as a reminder of the nuclear peril we face along with a plan of action that he and others suggest.

### **Launch and Command**

Russia and the U.S. each have the ability to strike the other with great force, destroy the other's cities and industrial and military bases.

The essence of this first-strike capacity is the ability to wipe out the deterrent of the other side or weaken it so that the remaining force could be intercepted for the most part.

How can a targeted nation respond to such a capability? It must convince the adversary that such a strike is futile because it will not destroy the deterrent of the targeted nation. The attacker must understand that the nuclear force of the targeted nation, its nuclear deterrent, will survive, and the attacker will be annihilated.

The first approach to ensure this survivability is to build ever more nuclear weapons. Thus, when the U.S. pioneered its first-strike capability in the Cold War, the Soviet Union responded with a buildup. Quite quickly both had a first-strike capacity with the competitive buildup reaching the insane levels shown [here](#). Each side also took the following additional measures.

The first measure to prevent the loss of deterrence is to put the nuclear force on Launch on Warning, which is also described as [Hair Trigger Alert](#).

Most of us have heard about this, but we ought to quake in our boots every time it comes to mind. Since the time to respond to a first strike is only tens of minutes for an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) attack, which takes about 30 minutes to travel between the U.S. and Russia, and even less time for a short or intermediate range missile, a targeted country must have its nuclear force loaded onto delivery vehicles and capable of being launched on warning of a nuclear attack.

Nuclear warheads that are loaded onto delivery vehicles are said to be “deployed.” They are ready to be launched in minutes. On each side –both in Russia and in the U.S. – roughly 1,600 such warheads were loaded onto long-range delivery vehicles in 2018. (There are several thousand more warheads in reserve on each side but not “deployed.”) It is easy to see the danger inherent in this situation.

The second measure to prevent loss of deterrence is “delegation.” This is not widely known or understood.

One aspect of a first strike would be an attempt to knock out known command centers so that a retaliatory strike could not be ordered. This is known as “decapitation.” The antidote to decapitation is “delegation,” that is, others besides the presidents and their immediate successors are authorized to press “the button.” It works this way. These “others” are located in secret command centers far from Washington or the Strategic Air Command Base in Colorado, both of which will be targeted in a decapitation strike. If these secret centers find themselves cut off from communication with Washington or Moscow, then the assumption is made that a decapitating nuclear strike has occurred. In that event these “others” removed from the centers of power are authorized to press the nuclear button. These others are not elected officials and in fact we do not know who they are. What Ellsberg discovered is that some of these “others” are military people who are concerned that they too could be hit in a decapitating strike. So they also have the authority to delegate.

In fact, no one, perhaps not even the president, nor his circle of advisors, knows who can launch the nuclear

weapons. Is it possible that one might be like the fictional General Jack D. Ripper, the psychotic, delusional fellow who gives the launch order in Dr. Strangelove, or someone lusting after the Rapture?

In summary, first-strike capability is the source of the problem. It leads to a nuclear arms buildup, launch on warning and delegation. The idea of having such a capability is deeply imbedded in U.S. "strategic" thinking and will be hard to dislodge.

### **Weapons of Human Extinction**

The second component of a Doomsday Machine is the weaponry. What is the destructive power of the nuclear weapons used in a first strike? In 1961, when Ellsberg was among those working on nuclear-war fighting strategy for the Kennedy administration, he requested an estimate from the Pentagon of the deaths due to a first strike as the war planners had mapped it out then. To his surprise the estimate came back at once – the Pentagon had made it and kept it hidden. At a time when the global population was about 3 billion, a first strike by the U.S. would result in the deaths of 1.2 billion from explosions, radiation and fire. That number was deaths only, not injuries. And it was only the result of U.S. weapons; it did not include deaths from a Soviet response if they managed one. The deaths would be concentrated in targeted countries, then and now the U.S. and Russia. Ellsberg was stunned to learn that the Pentagon would coolly make plans for such a gargantuan and immediate genocide. And so should we all be.

But the damage does not stop there. This is the surprise that the Pentagon did not understand at the time. The ash from the fires of burning cities would be cast up into the stratosphere so high that it would not be rained out. There it would remain for at least a decade, blocking enough sunlight to prevent crops from growing for 10 years. That is sufficient to cause total starvation and wipe out the entire human race, with only a handful at most able to survive. Nuclear winter was publicized in the 1980s and encountered some initial skepticism.

Now with the interest in global warming, better computer models have been developed. When the results of a nuclear first strike are put into these models, nuclear winter again makes its appearance as Brian Toon, Alan Robock and others have shown. The TED talks of Toon and of Robock describing their findings are well worthwhile; they are brief and well-illustrated. We are confronted with a genocide of all or nearly all humanity, an "Omnicide."

The launch of the 1600 "deployed" warheads of either the U.S. or Russia is sufficient to give us nuclear winter. So we in the U.S. have put in place a weapon system on hair-trigger alert commanded by we know not whom that can kill virtually all Americans – along with most everyone else on the planet.

We have on hair trigger alert a weapon that is in fact suicidal. Even if we neglect the effects of nuclear winter, the nuclear attacks would be concentrated on Russia and the U.S. So most of us would be consumed. Thus MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) is replaced with SAD (Self-Assured Destruction).

## Abandoning First-Strike Policy & Capacity

Dismantling the Doomsday Machine with its hair-trigger alert and system of delegation means abandoning a first-strike policy *and* capacity. And right now, only two countries have such first strike capacity and only one, the U.S., refuses to take the right to use it “off the table” even when not under attack

What does the elimination of first-strike capacity mean in practice? This involves two basic steps for the U.S. First, the land-based ICBMs, the Minuteman III, must be entirely dismantled, not refurbished as is currently being undertaken at enormous cost. These missiles, the land-based part of the Strategic Triad, are highly accurate but fixed in place like “sitting ducks.” They are only good for a first strike, for they will be destroyed in a successful first strike by an adversary. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry and James E. Cartwright, formerly head of the Strategic Air Command and formerly vice chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have both called for dismantling the Minuteman III. The second step is to reduce the Trident Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) force to the level where it cannot destroy the entire Russian land-based missile force.

Russia would also need to execute similar measures, taking into account the specifics of its arsenal. Here negotiations, treaties and verification are necessary. But these are impossible in the current atmosphere of Russiagate and Russophobia, which is why both are existential threats and must be surmounted. We must talk despite our differences, real or perceived.

An additional measure has also been proposed. All nuclear warheads should be removed from deployed status by Russia and the U.S. (The anodyne term is “de-alerting.”) That is, the warheads should be removed from their delivery vehicles and stored in a way that would take days or even weeks to deploy – that is to remount. This has been proposed by the Global Zero [Commission on Nuclear Risk Reduction](#) whose plan is laid out [here](#).

## **The Work Ahead**

Total abolition should be the ultimate goal because no human hand should be allowed to wield species-destroying power. But it seems that an intermediate goal is not only needed to give us the breathing space to get to zero nuclear weapons. An intermediate and readily achievable goal can call attention to the problem and motivate large numbers of people. The [Nuclear Freeze movement](#) of the 1980s is a very successful example of this sort of effort; it played a big role in making the Reagan-Gorbachev accords possible.

The effort to kill the Doomsday Machines might well be called something like “Step Away from Doomsday” or simply “Step Away.” At two minutes to midnight we must make haste to do this. Abolishing nuclear weapons will require a breakthrough in the way countries deal with one another, especially nuclear armed countries. Let us give ourselves the breathing space to accomplish that.

An earlier version of this article appeared on [Anti-war.com](#).

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