

Stefania Maurizi on How Julian Assange Changed Journalism

The Italian journalist and longtime media partner of *WikiLeaks* speaks with Dennis J. Bernstein and Randy Credico about the implications of Assange's struggle against U.S. extradition.

By [Dennis J Bernstein](#) and [Randy Credico](#)

[KPFA Flashpoints](#)



Julian Assange was back in court twice last week, and will return to a high British court next month for the major legal battle of his life. It will determine whether the U.S. is allowed to extradite the *WikiLeaks* publisher to the U.S. for prosecution.

In the first of a series of extradition hearings on May 2, [Assange appeared](#) in court via video screen. He seemed composed and focused and ready to fight. He told the British High Court: "I do not wish to surrender for extradition. I'm a journalist winning many, many awards and protecting many people." The next procedural hearing is scheduled for May 30 and another substantive hearing for early June.

Stefania Maurizi is an investigative journalist for the Italian daily *la Repubblica* and the author of two books; "Dossier WikiLeaks: Segreti Italiani" and "Una Bomba, Dieci Storie." She has for years worked closely with Assange on some of the most significant *WikiLeaks* releases including ["Collateral Murder."](#) Maurizi also worked closely with Glenn Greenwald on the files about

Italy of Edward Snowden, who blew the whistle on National Security Agency surveillance.

On May 2, right after Assange's high court appearance, [Maurizi told us](#) that she fears for the health and welfare of Assange. She said she also fears for what it might mean to other journalists and whistleblowers if Assange is convicted in a U.S. court for his crucial work with whistleblowers, which has been used widely by news organizations.

Dennis Bernstein: Stefania Maurizi, I'd like you to start by giving us your gut reaction to what we have seen so far in terms of the treatment of Julian in recent days.

Stefania Maurizi: For me it has been really shocking to witness how Julian Assange has declined in the last nine years. I have been able to see changes in Julian's health and psychology. It was so sad, and no one could do anything. I could report on it and expose it but the other media and public opinion did absolutely nothing to make the government understand how terrible his treatment was. And all this is happening not in Russia, not in North Korea, this is happening in London, in the heart of Europe. I now realize how little we can do in our democracy. If you look at what has happened to high-profile whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, and an important publisher like Assange, who had the courage to publish these important revelations, what did your democracy do to save them, to treat them in a human way? Chelsea Manning was put in prison for seven years, where she tried to commit suicide twice. Now she is back in prison. Edward Snowden was forced to leave the U.S. Julian Assange has spent nine years in detainment and no one did anything. We were reporting, we were denouncing, we were exposing how seriously his health was declining. Nothing happened.

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Dennis Bernstein: You've worked very closely with Julian Assange in Italy. You were in a sense a co-publisher in getting out crucial documentation. Could you talk about why you consider Assange not only a publisher, but one of the most important publishers of our time?

Stefania Maurizi: I started working with *WikiLeaks* in 2009 when very few people knew about them. They hadn't yet published important documents like "Collateral Murder" or the "War Logs." I immediately saw that they were going to start a revolution. And that is what has happened: They have changed journalism. Their model of journalism spread and we see now leaks everywhere. We see this model of collaborative media partnership used by many media, like the Panama Papers Consortium. In addition, you have to realize the importance of what they have revealed. They have revealed the true face of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They have revealed the inner working of U.S. diplomacy, for example, how they put pressure on Italian prosecutors who were trying to convict 23 Americans, almost all CIA agents, responsible for the extraordinary renditions here in Italy. Or they published revelations of how the U.S. forced the Italian government to purchase a Lockheed jet fighter. This information is now available to everyone. You can see how *The Washington Post* used emails to investigate the [Jamal] Khashoggi murder and they were able to do so because they had the courage to publish these files. Even in the case of the Panama Papers, only the journalists inside the partnership can access the original files. *WikiLeaks* made these files fully accessible to everyone, so that every journalist, ever activist, every scholar, every citizen can be empowered by this information free of charge. That is the revolution.

Dennis Bernstein: Chelsea Manning is now in jail, refusing

to cooperate with the grand jury. This is someone who spent so much time in solitary confinement. One of the key collaborations had to do with the activities of the U.S. government in Central America, destabilizing, undermining governments. Now they say they never get involved. If you look at the documentation in the context of the current attempt by [U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela] Elliot Abrams to destabilize Venezuela, here comes *WikiLeaks* again.

Stefania Maurizi: Absolutely. Whenever we have a scandal, we can go to the *WikiLeaks* website and search for any pertinent information. The information they publish continues to inform the public. They are now paying a huge price. I myself feel guilty because I was able throughout the past 10 years to work on all these documents, to verify them and publish them without any risk. Julian and *WikiLeaks* are paying a huge price and all the editors are silent. People accuse me of acting as an activist. I am not acting as an activist, I am speaking out because I feel uncomfortable when I see how professional journalists have all sorts of protection and are not facing imprisonment or extradition.

Randy Credico: The last time I saw you was in December of 2017. I had seen Julian three months earlier and his health had declined noticeably in those few months. Now that he is in jail, is he able to see doctors? What is his physical health like at this point?

Stefania Maurizi: I am not sure whether he is able to see visitors. It is a very strict regime, there are very strict rules for suspected terrorists. He spends most of his time completely alone. This comes after spending the last seven years at the embassy almost entirely alone, apart from occasional visits. So you can imagine how his forced isolation is affecting his health.

Randy Credico: I look at the sentence that judge Deborah Taylor handed down: a year in jail for allegedly skipping bail. Can you go into the bogus charges that were never filed against Julian, and how they were perpetuated with the assistance of the Crown Prosecution Service?

Stefania Maurizio: Three years had passed since the Swedish case was closed. No journalistic organization had ever tried to access these documents. Thousands of journalists had covered the case but no one had the facts clear. At that point I realized that it was important from a journalistic point of view to try to access the documentation. These documents allow us to establish important facts, such as that it was the U.K. that advised the Swedish prosecutors against questioning Assange in London. The whole case began with this refusal by the Swedish prosecutor. Now we know that behind this decision there was the Crown Prosecution Service. Let's not forget that this agency is the very same agency which is in charge of deciding whether to extradite Julian Assange to the U.S. now. The Crown Prosecution Service entered the case at the very beginning and they advised the Swedish prosecutor against questioning Assange in London. Julian Assange never refused to be questioned, he refused to be extradited because he was convinced that the extradition to Sweden could pave the way for his extradition to the U.S.

Now we see that he was right.

And it was the Crown Prosecution Service which advised the Swedish prosecutor against dropping the case in 2013. At that time the Swedish prosecutor considered to drop the case but the Crown Prosecution Service was against this possibility.

Finally, it was the Crown Prosecution Service who destroyed crucial emails about the case, even though the case is still ongoing. I am still fighting in the U.K. tribunal because I want to access these documents and fill in the gaps. Now the Swedish prosecutor is

evaluating whether to open this case once again. The statute of limitations is in August 2020. There is a massive campaign about Julian being a rapist. After one or two years of this campaign, who will care about Julian Assange being extradited to the U.S.? That is a possible scenario.

Dennis Bernstein: Again, Julian had his first hearing today [May 2, 2019] regarding extradition to the United States. He looked okay but he is definitely in danger. Stefania, what responsibility do we have as journalists to stand up? According to Daniel Ellsberg, if they go after Julian and Chelsea the way they want to in the United States, it is the end of journalism.

Stefania Maurizi: Absolutely. This case is about whether the press is allowed to publish documents like the video "Collateral Murder," which records war crimes and whether the press is allowed to publish documents about the NSA spying on world leaders, whether the press is allowed to publish documents on Guantanamo Bay. We saw what happened after 9/11: habeas corpus came to an end with Guantanamo, the Fourth Amendment [of the U.S. Constitution] was trampled by the NSA. Now they want to destroy the First Amendment and they will do it using Julian Assange. They will not go after *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*.

Dennis Bernstein: Wouldn't you say that part of the genius of *WikiLeaks* was the ability to guarantee anonymity? The reason why Assange has been successful and all these major journalistic organizations were willing to work with him is because of this process he created to guarantee anonymity.



Stefania Maurizi: Julian Assange understands technology and he understands the nature of power. Most geeks know very

little about power, about empire. Thanks to his knowledge in the technology field, we have this platform. But let's not forget that *WikiLeaks* is in trouble now not because they have this platform, but because they have the courage to publish. It is not enough to get the documents. Most newsrooms hide such documents. One of the journalists at *The Washington Post* had the video "Collateral Murder" and he didn't publish it. *WikiLeaks* did. It is not enough to have the platform: you have to have the integrity and the courage to publish. *The New York Times* didn't publish the important story that the NSA was intercepting the communications of U.S. citizens for more than a year. For years *The New York Times* didn't want to use the word "torture," preferring instead "enhanced interrogation." The reason the U.S. authorities are hostile toward *WikiLeaks* and Julian Assange is because they publish what the U.S. media and many other media don't want to publish.

Dennis Bernstein: Would you like to do a shout-out from one courageous woman there in Italy to a woman who became a woman in solitary confinement and was arrested again on International Women's Day?

Stefania Maurizi: I feel a huge debt of gratitude because I have worked on Chelsea Manning's documents for years. I supported her defense fund, I wrote to her in prison. I have tried to explain to my readers why she is tremendously courageous. I really would like to see her go free because I cannot accept that one of the most important journalistic sources of all time is again in prison.

Dennis Bernstein: Both Randy and I are extremely grateful for your work, Stefania Maurizi, investigative journalist

for *la Repubblica* and author of [“Dossier WikiLeaks,”](#) which describes the power of a courageous publisher like Julian Assange, who has worked with extraordinary sources to get information out which we would otherwise never have heard.

[Listen](#) to the interview on KPFA.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [“Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom.”](#) You can access the audio archives at [Flashpoint](#). You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

Randy Credico is an American perennial political candidate, comedian, radio host, activist and the former director of the William Moses Kunstler Fund for Racial Justice.

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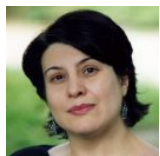
Inside WikiLeaks: Working with the Publisher that Changed the World

Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi has worked with WikiLeaks for nine years on the Podesta emails and other revelations. Here’s an insider’s view of the publisher, which has incensed rulers around the world, desperate to hide their corruption.

By Stefania Maurizi

in Rome

Special to Consortium News



Silenced and cut off from the outside world, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been confined to the Ecuadorian embassy in London for the last six years with no access to sunlight, fresh air, or proper medical treatment. Furthermore, last March President Lenin Moreno's Ecuadorian government cut his access to the internet, phone calls and even visitors and journalists. For a man who has already been confined to the embassy for so long, these restrictions are particularly harsh.

I began working as one of WikiLeaks' media partners in 2009, before Assange and WikiLeaks published such bombshells as the "Collateral Murder" video. Over the last nine years, I have partnered with WikiLeaks on behalf of my newspaper, the Italian daily *La Repubblica* to work on the Podesta emails and many of its other secret files, except for those that WikiLeaks released without media partners: the DNC emails, the Saudi Cables, Turkey's ruling party emails, the Hacking Team documents, the Collateral Murder video and the Brennan emails.

Like its work or not, WikiLeaks is an independent media organization that doesn't have to rely on traditional media to publish its scoops. Indeed it was founded to bypass the legal qualms traditional media may have about publishing classified information.

With its 5.5 million followers on Twitter, WikiLeaks has a huge social media presence that gives its work immediate impact. But WikiLeaks has published most of its revelations in collaboration with a number of media partners.

For instance, I was a partner in the publication of the emails of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign manager, which were published by WikiLeaks shortly after the infamous *Access Hollywood* video revealed candidate Donald Trump making rude remarks about women.

Many media outlets continue to report that the Podesta emails were released only minutes after the *Access Hollywood* video aired, hinting at some sort of coordination between WikiLeaks and the Trump campaign. In a indictment issued last Friday, Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel investigating the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections, charged 12 officers of the Russian military intelligence service, GRU, for having allegedly hacked both the DNC and Podesta emails and allegedly passed them on to WikiLeaks for publication.

I have no idea who WikiLeaks' sources were for the Podesta emails: the whole concept of WikiLeaks is based on the submission of secret or otherwise restricted documents by anonymous sources. Assange said numerous times that his



source for the Clinton emails was not the

As I worked on the Podesta emails, I do know that their publication was not a last-second decision. I had been alerted the day before, and their staggered release was a choice WikiLeaks made after the organization was harshly criticized by mainstream media for publishing the DNC documents all at once. This time the emails would trickle out to make them easier for the public to digest. But that was criticized too by the U.S. media and the Democrats as an attempt to leave Clinton bleeding a few weeks before the elections.

Ready to Release Trump Documents

I was also a witness when WikiLeaks received four documents about Trump's business at a certain point during the campaign and media partners were asked to help verify the documents to determine if they should be published. The WikiLeaks team had already prepared a placeholder graphic for a possible release on Trump: a caricature of Trump and his characteristic hairstyle. Unfortunately, we found that the documents had already been made public.

Over the last nine years of my work in partnership with WikiLeaks on behalf of first the Italian newsmagazine *L'Espresso* and then *La Repubblica*, I have spent many hours talking to Assange and his staff, maintaining weekly contact with them. Looking back, I realize that in all those years, I only met Assange as a free man once. That was in September 2010: he had just left Sweden to meet me and other journalists in Berlin after the publication of the Afghan War Logs. At that time, I didn't realize so many years would pass without seeing him free again.

He is one of the most demonized men on the planet. "We are in the business of crucifixion," he told me several months ago, before Ecuador cut his social contacts. Indeed he has been crucified for whatever he has done: he talked to the press? He is a narcissist. He didn't talk to the press? He wants to fuel his

image as an international mystery man. He is a complicated human being, but he is neither a hard man nor the imperious, James Bond-style villain depicted by newspapers. He can be warm, with a sharp sense of humor, and he is definitely brilliant and bold enough to publish exceptionally risky documents.

The Full Force of the State

WikiLeaks is rather unique from many standpoints. As a media organization publishing exclusively secret or otherwise restricted documents on “invisible powers,” such as intelligence agencies, which citizens do not normally perceive as directly relevant to their lives, there is little doubt that WikiLeaks has the full force of the State against it. It is probably the only Western media organization to have been under continuous investigation by the U.S. authorities – and probably others—since 2010, and it is definitely the only one whose editor is arbitrarily detained in the heart of Europe.

Whenever I say that Assange is the only editor arbitrarily detained in Europe, some object that he isn't detained, or that he isn't an editor at all. But that he is arbitrarily detained is the opinion of the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, whose decisions are considered authoritative by the European Court of Human Rights. The UK government has always rejected the UN body's decision on Assange, and even tried to appeal it. Since losing this appeal, the UK authorities have continued to ignore the decision and apparently no one else has anything to say about it.

Many argue that Assange is not detained, but rather is in a state of “self-imposed exile,” since he could leave the embassy at any time. He could, if he wanted to, walk out and be arrested by the UK authorities, on now flimsy skipping bail conditions after Sweden dropped its investigation against him, and he'd face the risk of extradition to the United States. Last year the former head of the CIA, Mike Pompeo, attacked him and his organization ferociously, calling WikiLeaks a “non-state hostile intelligence service.” The current Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, has declared that arresting him is a priority.

Assange's lawyers believe a grand jury in the state of Virginia has likely rendered a sealed indictment against him. Theoretically he is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. constitution, which protects publication of stolen documents, something that major media does routinely. However, through the last years we have seen many attempts by the U.S. authorities to claim WikiLeaks and Assange have no First Amendment rights.

Curiously, those critics who insist he is in a form of self-imposed exile or confinement seem to forget that Assange has attempted all sorts of legal routes to challenge his detention. I have never heard of someone imposing exile on

himself while at the same time attempting various legal means to put an end to it.

Assange's latest appeal to the Westminster Magistrates' Court was dismissed last February by the British judge Emma Arbuthnot, in a ruling indicating that for UK Justice it is perfectly fine for an individual to remain confined to a tiny building for almost six years with no access to sunlight, fresh air or proper medical treatment. "I do not find that Mr. Assange's stay in the Embassy is inappropriate, unjust, unpredictable, unreasonable, unnecessary or disproportionate", concluded Arbuthnot with no British irony.

As far as the concept of "editor" goes, I can refer to my own experience, describing what I have seen on my end: Assange has always been the person coordinating WikiLeaks publication activities, making the editorial choices, deciding how to present the revelations to the public—just like any editor of traditional media. He and his organization are far from perfect: they have made mistakes and questionable choices, but it is a matter of fact that they have revealed very important information in the public interest.

Journalism and Beyond

Thanks to WikiLeaks, it has been possible to reveal the true face of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq ([Afghan War Logs](#), [Iraq War Logs Files](#) and [Collateral Murder](#)), the identities of Guantanamo detainees ([Gitmo Files](#)), the scandals and embarrassing diplomatic deals contained in 251,287 U.S. diplomacy cables, such as pressure from the U.S. to neutralize Italian prosecutors investigating the extraordinary rendition of the Milan cleric, Abu Omar ([Cablegate](#)).

It has been possible to reveal the inner workings of the U.S. private intelligence firm Stratfor ([GIFiles](#)) and the National Security Agency intercepts on German, French, Italian and Japanese leaders, including intercepts of the controversial, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi ([NSA World Spying Files](#)). WikiLeaks also revealed EU operations to stop migrants and refugees ([EU Military Ops Against Refugee Flow Files](#)), and the CIA cyber weapons ([Vault 7 Files](#)). Its [Tunisia Files](#) contributed to the uprising there that set off the so-called Arab Spring. WikiLeaks has also released a cache of [Spy Files](#) from Russia.

All this valuable information has been made available to the world by WikiLeaks completely free of charge, so that once in the public domain, journalists, activists, scholars and citizens can access it directly worldwide, without needing media organizations or journalists to access the original files and make informed choices.

This publication strategy has worked: the exiled Islanders from the Chagos Archipelago for example have been using the U.S. diplomacy cables in court to support their struggle to return to the Chagos Islands, while a German citizen, Khaled el-Masri, used the cables to support his case at the European Court of Human Rights against his extraordinary rendition.

As WikiLeaks sees it, publishing information in the public interest is an act that involves journalism, but also goes beyond journalism. That is why after partnering with media organizations, WikiLeaks makes the files publicly available so that everyone can access and use them.

Assange and his team pioneered a model so effective that it has been copied by many. They started a platform for anonymous submission of secret or otherwise restricted documents, a concept which has since been adopted by almost all major media outlets. They also established cross-jurisdictional collaborative reporting, now a model for major organizations like the Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which published notable revelations like the Panama Papers.

Risk

Throughout the last nine years, I have seen Assange and his staff take enormous risks. "They run towards the risks everyone else runs away from," Edward Snowden once told me in an interview. That means they take risks corporate media won't take. At the end of the day corporate media are corporations: many decide they can afford only limited legal risks. As for the extralegal risks, few traditional editors and journalists are eager to end up confined to an embassy for six years.

We have seen what happened to Snowden when he was abandoned in Hong Kong: it took Assange's close adviser, Wikileaks journalist Sarah Harrison, and the WikiLeaks' staff to help him seek asylum. Although the newspapers that had obtained the Snowden files could have exerted enormous contractual power if they had wanted to broker an agreement with the U.S. government to protect Snowden, none of them did. As the American science fiction author Bruce Sterling put it: "It's incredible to me that, among the eight zillion civil society groups on the planet that hate and fear spooks and police spies, not one of them could offer Snowden one shred of practical help, except for Wikileaks."

From the very beginning, I have witnessed the virulent attacks against Assange and his staff and the dramatic failure of mainstream and non-mainstream journalists to seek factual information on the Swedish case by means of FOIA or other investigative tools. In the course of these last seven years, no media has tried to access the full file on Julian Assange and WikiLeaks.

It took an Italian journalist to litigate a FOIA in Sweden and in the UK because no international or local journalist had done so. While my FOIA litigation unearthed some suspicious facts (like the deletion of many crucial emails written and received by the British lawyer who had handled the Assange case for the Crown Prosecution Service – a deletion for which the UK authorities have provided no explanation) there has been no follow-up by any international or British media.

The Kremlin's Useful Idiots?

Recently, *The Guardian* said, "Assange has a longstanding relationship with Russia Today. He has regularly appeared in interviews with the Russian broadcaster and hosted a program on RT in 2012." In reality the broadcasting license for that program, known as "The World Tomorrow", was acquired by my newsgroup as well, which publishes *La Repubblica* and *l'Espresso*. As far as I know, that program was not the product of any unique collaboration between WikiLeaks and RT.



While it is true that Assange and his staff have appeared on the Russian channel numerous times, I have only heard of one instance in which RT was a partner with WikiLeaks in the publication of secret files: the "Spy Files", a series about brochures on private companies selling surveillance technologies. When WikiLeaks partners

with traditional media, the partners know each other, they share the findings and the workload. Based on what I have observed, RT has never been part of this process, though it is true that RT quickly jumps on whatever WikiLeaks publishes, running articles on WikiLeaks publications based on the organization's press releases and reporting on everything on the WikiLeaks front.

Russia perceives Assange as a sort of Western dissident. The country definitely

loves the idea of “Western dissidents” and is happy to stick a finger in the eyes of the West by assuring wide coverage for Assange and his organization. Russia media highlights the contradictions in Western democracies which, while preaching aggressive journalism and the protection of journalistic sources, have instead put Chelsea Manning in prison, charged Snowden, investigated WikiLeaks for the last eight years and has kept its editor arbitrarily detained with no end in sight.

WikiLeaks has been accused of being the Kremlin’s useful idiot or its laundromat, or even a front for Russian intelligence. These kinds of allegations have been spread by the media with no solid evidence, always quoting anonymous intelligence officials who have an obvious interest in destroying WikiLeaks’ reputation. To protect himself and his organization, Assange has always avoided revealing the inner workings of WikiLeaks so as to not expose its resources and vulnerabilities to powerful entities like the CIA, which perceive WikiLeaks as an existential threat to themselves.

This approach has helped project an allure of mystery and menace which has been used by many media outlets to fuel a vitriolic campaign against Assange and WikiLeaks as James Bond-style villains with something dark to hide. Had Assange and his team ever lifted the veil and allowed the public to see the inner workings of WikiLeaks, public opinion would have perceived what is really behind it: a willingness to take the heat even in the face of very powerful entities.

No one can say how it will end for Assange and his team: if they end up in jail in the United States, it will be the first time that an editor and a media organization are imprisoned in the U.S. for their work, at least not since John Peter Zenger in Colonial America. As the icon of whistleblowers, Daniel Ellsberg, put it: “Under Trump, he may well be the first journalist in this country to be indicted.” There is a deafening silence on the impact of such a scenario on the freedom of the press and on the human rights of Assange and his staff.

Stefania Maurizi works for the Italian daily La Repubblica as an investigative journalist, after ten years working for the Italian newsmagazine *l’Espresso*. She has worked on all WikiLeaks releases of secret documents, and partnered with Glenn Greenwald to reveal the Snowden files about Italy. She has also interviewed A.Q. Khan, the father of the Pakistani atomic bomb, revealed the condolence payment agreement between the US government and the family of the Italian aid worker Giovanni Lo Porto killed in a US drone strike, and investigated the harsh working conditions of Pakistani workers in a major Italian garment factory in Karachi. She has started a multi-jurisdictional FOIA litigation effort to defend the right of the press to access the full set of

documents on the Julian Assange and WikiLeaks case. She authored two books: *Dossier WikiLeaks. Segreti Italiani* and *Una Bomba, Dieci Storie*, the latter translated into Japanese. She can be reached at stefania.maurizi@riseup.net

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Signs of U.K. Misconduct in Assange Case

The world's most prominent freedom-of-the-press case remains the legal pressure on WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, still in Ecuador's London embassy amid signs of U.K. prosecutorial misconduct, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

A British court proceeding on a freedom of information request regarding how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) dealt with the case of WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange has revealed that CPS deleted relevant emails from the account of a now-retired CPS lawyer, Paul Close.

However, one email that wasn't destroyed shows the CPS lawyer advising Swedish prosecutor Marianne Ny not to interview Assange in London, a decision that has helped keep Assange stuck for more than five years in Ecuador's London embassy where he had been granted asylum. Finally, in late 2016, after Swedish prosecutors did question Assange at the embassy, they dropped sex abuse allegations against him, but he still faces possible arrest in the U.K. as well as potential extradition to the U.S., where officials have denounced him for releasing classified material.

Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, who has worked on WikiLeaks disclosures as a media partner since 2009, has made freedom of information requests in several countries regarding the Assange case. On Monday, I spoke with Estelle Dehon, a lawyer for Maurizi.

Dennis Bernstein: You represented Stefania Maurizi in court today. Give us the background, what got you into court today?

Estelle Dehon: It has to do with access to information. In the United States there is legislation which can allow individuals to have access to official information held by public authorities. We have the same type of system in the

United Kingdom.

My client, the extraordinary Italian investigative journalist Stefania Maurizi, made a freedom of information request to the Crown Prosecution Service for information about Julian Assange. In particular, she was asking for copies of correspondence between the Crown Prosecution Service and the Swedish prosecution authorities and any correspondence with the US State Department, the Department of Justice, or the state of Ecuador. Obviously, this all relates to the situation that has occurred with Mr. Assange being arbitrarily detained in the Ecuadorian embassy.

Dennis Bernstein: There were revelations just a week or two ago that some of the key information you are seeking has been destroyed.

Estelle Dehon: Information has been coming out piecemeal. Initially, the Crown Prosecution Service refused to provide anything. As the appeal has been going forward before the tribunal, they started to release information. Just last week we were informed that the email account of the main lawyer in the case who was corresponding with the Swedish Prosecution Authority was deleted when he retired from the Crown Prosecution Service in 2014. One of the things we were asking today was how that could possibly have taken place. We had been told that the extradition matter had come to an end when the Supreme Court in 2012 upheld the arrest warrant for Mr. Assange.

So on the one hand the Crown Prosecution Service is saying that at that point the extradition matter we were dealing with came to an end. But on the other hand, they are saying, as a way of resisting full disclosure, that the extradition matter is ongoing. So which is it? If this is a case that is closed, in which case emails can be deleted then in the public interest, as much information as possible should be released. And if this is a case that is ongoing, then what could the justification possibly be for deleting the email account of one of the key people involved?

Dennis Bernstein: Could you talk a little about the documents that have already been released and what it is you are still looking for?

Estelle Dehon: A number of pieces of correspondence between the Crown Prosecution Service and the Swedish Prosecution Authority have been released, some of them with only slight redaction and some of them very heavily redacted. One of the things they are arguing today at the tribunal is that these redactions should be removed. That correspondence really looks at the flow of information from Sweden to the Crown Prosecution Service and back again. This information revealed that the Crown Prosecution Service had advised the Swedish prosecutor not to travel to the United Kingdom to interview Mr. Assange, despite

the fact that that offer had been made. That advice was provided very early on, in January 2011. One of the things we seek through the information request is to understand why that advice was given at that time and why that advice seemed to remain the same, despite the situation arising with the Ecuadorian embassy.

I must explain that we rely quite heavily on the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, who made a determination in December 2015, as the result of a complaint made by Mr. Assange, that they considered Mr. Assange was being arbitrarily detained in the Ecuadorian embassy.

We don't explicitly say as part of our case that the tribunal has to come to the same determination. What we say is that, because this very respected United Nations body came to that conclusion, that is highly relevant to the correspondence and the advice between the Crown Prosecution Service and the Swedish authorities. We still haven't seen any indication that that UN decision changed the way the authorities were dealing with Mr. Assange, with the way they were refusing to come and question him.

One of the revelations from the court case today was that the Crown Prosecution Service certainly did not consider that the determination by the UN panel made any difference to the way in which they were treating Mr. Assange's case. But we are still persisting with the request, to see if any of the information that has been provided can be unredacted.

Dennis Bernstein: In terms of the destroyed documents, the Crown Prosecution Service is saying they don't have the slightest idea what documents were destroyed or the implications of those documents. Do you believe that?

Estelle Dehon: I think I do believe that. As I understand it, the email account has been completely destroyed. There is no way of getting it back. At a very high level we know that whatever was in the email account of that lawyer having to do with Assange's case is now gone. All that remains is the correspondence that was printed out. And we are told that we have been provided with all the emails that exist in hard copy, albeit heavily redacted. Today, however, it was revealed that, despite assurances from the Crown Prosecution Service that they had released all the relevant documents, it turns out they may have uncovered some further emails.

Dennis Bernstein: Britain has worked very closely with the United States in intelligence matters. Is there any indication that the big hand of the United States has been dictating the course of events here, for example, by preventing the Swedish ambassador from conducting the interview with Assange and possibly finding out that there wasn't any substance to the charges against him?

Estelle Dehon: There is certainly no evidence of that in the information that has been disclosed to us or in what has been presented in court. What we don't know is what the documents that have not been disclosed might show in that regard. We don't know if there has been any influence exerted by the United States.

A key part of my client, Ms. Maurizio's, request was for correspondence between the Crown Prosecution Service and the US State Department and the US Department of Justice. The response we had today was essentially a blanket "no." The Crown Prosecution Service will neither confirm nor deny whether such correspondence exists.

One of the things we will be asking the tribunal to rule on is that that is not a lawful approach for them to take. Our freedom of information law does not deal in blanket bans, it doesn't countenance that kind of secrecy. Our freedom of information law looks at the public interest and makes an objective determination about whether information should be confirmed or denied.

Dennis Bernstein: What is at the core of this case for you? What do you think this is really all about?

Estelle Dehon: First of all, I should explain that we were not before a high court today, we were before a body called an information tribunal. We may end up in the court system if we don't get the type of decision we think we should get in the tribunal system. But right now we are still at the very early stages.

In terms of what I think is at the heart of this case, I believe it is the clash between free speech and freedom of the press versus an official culture of secrecy. One of the great hopes of the information access regime which was put in place in 2000 in the United Kingdom was that it would foster a culture of openness. There wouldn't be any area where the stock response was to shut down and not to engage with the media.

Unfortunately, in certain areas such as extradition matters, it hasn't had that effect. The ethos of the freedom of information act, the important watchdog role that journalists play, simply hasn't featured on their radar.

And then, of course, Julian Assange's case is a very particular one. It is clear from the limited material we have been provided that the Crown Prosecution Service believed from the start that this was not just another extradition request. That is clearly because of the personality involved and because of the work Assange has undertaken with WikiLeaks. At the heart of this case is the clash between a very open, non-state organization taking state documents and

publishing outside of what a lot of countries are familiar with, between that and a culture of secrecy.

My hope is that in some small way this information tribunal will confront the public authorities who still look to be secret first and say to them, that is not the right approach. You have to consider properly and carefully the public interest in disclosure. Our own information commissioner has acknowledged that there was a significant public interest in the information requested by Ms. Maurizi. If that is the case, you cannot just close up and refuse to provide information. That cannot be your stock response.

Dennis Bernstein: Would you refer to Julian Assange as a journalist?

Estelle Dehon: We consider that he is an editor. Ms. Maurizi explained this to the tribunal today. As traditional journalists do, Assange speaks to sources and obtains information. And then he and WikiLeaks seek to validate that information. That is the editorial role. Then he works with media partners to release the information. That process, while it doesn't conform to the traditional media process, is in our view a type of journalism. We have characterized him as an editor and WikiLeaks as a journalistic organization.

Certainly Ms. Maurizi, in her role as an investigative journalist working with WikiLeaks, is a very clear example of a defender of democracy, a watchdog within the media looking to oppose corruption and shine light where it has not been shone before.

Dennis Bernstein: The courageous Israeli journalist Amira Hass once described the role of the journalist as "to monitor centers of power and report back to the people."

Estelle Dehon: Especially in an era where states exercise very significant power, and media organizations, however independent they try to be, can be influenced by that, a non-state, non-traditional actor such as WikiLeaks, which releases information not just to journalists but to the public at large is an important element of a democratic watchdog.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

The War on WikiLeaks and Assange

Helping government authorities discredit Julian Assange and destroy WikiLeaks, mainstream media outlets twisted a recent interview to make Assange look like a Donald Trump backer, write Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, who now reports for La Repubblica and has worked on WikiLeaks' releases of secret documents, complains that her recent interview with Julian Assange was distorted by the Guardian, the Washington Post and others to assign Assange a pro-Trump agenda.

The Guardian recently "amended" its reporting on her interview with Assange, but for the feisty, seasoned reporter it wasn't nearly enough. "I appreciate the Guardian amending the article, but at the same time the damage is done and I'm not convinced it was a solution," she said.

Maurizi is going to court in September in Great Britain to fight for the release of key documents that related directly to the process of Assange's treatment and his pursuit by various governments collaborating to shut his operations down.

"This is the first time that a reporter has tried to get access to these files," she said in a rare interview on Aug. 1, "which tells you something about the state of journalism these days."

Before joining la Repubblica, Maurizi spent ten years working for the Italian newsmagazine l'Espresso. Maurizi also partnered with Glenn Greenwald to reveal the Edward Snowden files as they pertain to Italy. She is author most recently of *Dossier WikiLeaks*.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us about your multiple struggles to get key documents that will shed light on the entire Assange affair.

Stefania Maurizi: I have spent the past two years struggling to access the documents on the Julian Assange case. I was finally forced to go to court and sue the UK government to get them to hand over the documents. This is the first time that a reporter has tried to get access to these files, which tells you something about the state of journalism these days.

Dozens of newspapers have talked with Assange over the past ten years and yet no one has attempted to get full access to these documents about the case. Here we have a high-profile publisher who is being arbitrarily detained by two of the most respected Western democracies, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and no one is

trying to get to these documents. It is incredible to me.

Randy Credico: Are any newspapers in London writing amicus briefs on your behalf?

SM: Honestly, I don't know. I can imagine there is some embarrassment about the fact that no newspaper has yet asked for these documents.

DB: What kinds of information do you expect to be in these documents? What could be the case in terms of freeing Julian Assange?

SM: First of all, I want to access the full correspondence between the UK authorities and the Swedish prosecutors. In 2015 I filed a Freedom of Information Act request and I obtained some documents from the Swedish authorities which made very clear that the UK put pressure on the Swedish authorities not to question Mr. Assange in London, which he and his lawyers had requested, but rather to extradite him to Sweden. This is why we have been in this legal quagmire for five years now with Julian stuck in arbitrary detention at the Ecuadorian embassy.

Julian Assange has never refused questioning. He has fought against extradition because he knows that extradition to Sweden would result in extradition to the United States. So the UK authorities advised the Swedish prosecutor against questioning him in London, which would have avoided this arbitrary detention.

I know for certain that there are thousands of documents pertaining to this case. I want to be able to access any documents pertaining to the exchange between the US and UK authorities and I want to access any documents about the exchange between the UK and Ecuador. I believe that there is a strong public interest in shedding light on this important and high-profile case. Can you imagine a high-profile editor in Europe under arbitrary detention? And yet no one is asking for the documents in this case!

RC: Why did you write *Dossier WikiLeaks*?

SM: That book is based on my access from 2009 to 2011 to the WikiLeaks documents about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Guantanamo files and those pertaining to the diplomacy cables. I read something like 13,000 pages of the diplomacy cables. Basically, I attempted to share with my readers the most important revelations contained in these documents.

For example, I acquired some solid information about how the US tried to stop the Italian prosecutors investigating the extraordinary rendition of Abu Omar. Or how the US authorities tried to pressure the Italian government to buy the Lockheed Martin fighter. Or how they tried to block the International Criminal

Court.

This is the kind of information that many reporters dream of getting access to and for the first time with WikiLeaks we were able to. I really appreciate WikiLeaks' publication strategy of making these documents available exclusively to certain media partners like myself and then later to the general public, to activists, journalists, lawyers, etc.

I believe that information needs to be free and accessible to everyone without restrictions. Of course, there is information which should be kept secret, regarding the security of nuclear facilities, for example. But these documents are different. These secrets are used by countries like the United States to protect themselves from inquiry, from prosecution, from embarrassment. These secrets are less legitimate.

DB: For the last six months, WikiLeaks has been publishing a series of documents on the CIA which they entitle Vault 7. Could you talk about the significance of Vault 7?

SM: Basically, Vault 7 consists of documents concerning the cyber weapons the CIA uses to penetrate our computers, our mobile devices, and so on. For the first time we have solid evidence concerning the use of these kinds of weapons by the CIA. Of course, these documents are of a highly technical nature so we have tried to make them accessible to the general public. But it is very important to have an insight into these tools, so that we can understand what they can and cannot do.

As far as we have been able to determine, they have no magic wand, no wonder weapon. They have come up with some smart solutions, they have some impressive tools, but no magic wand. At the end of the day, we verified the documents as genuine and we made them accessible to the public.

In the case of technical documents, you go to a trusted expert to check whether a procedure makes sense, whether the software makes sense, classification marks, etc. I don't want to go into too much detail on how we verify documents because that might compromise our work. But the tough part of this work is verifying the documents. I can tell you that in my eight years of work with WikiLeaks I have been to court several times and was able to verify that the documents were genuine and my coverage was correct. We have won libel cases in court.

RC: What has motivated you to cover the WikiLeaks case these past eight years?

SM: Before I went into journalism, I got a degree in mathematics. One of my sources in cryptography put WikiLeaks on my radar screen back in 2008, when very few journalists had even heard of WikiLeaks. In 2009 they contacted me and

wanted me to verify the authenticity of some important documents concerning Italy. That was our first partnership together. Since then I have been involved in all of WikiLeaks' releases.

The reason I am very interested in this work is that, first of all, it gives you access to documents which you would never have access to otherwise. In Italy there are families of people who were massacred who sixty years later are still unable to get access to information about their loved ones, they cannot get to the truth. I believe it is very important to be able to get access to unauthorized disclosures or secret documents like CIA and NSA documents. WikiLeaks provides us with unprecedented access to these documents. People at the CIA and the NSA have no accountability, there is no serious oversight. In this case there is a real need for unauthorized disclosures. They want to continue to operate in darkness.

DB: Do you feel that your recent interview with Julian Assange has been distorted by publications such as the Guardian and the Washington Post and across the internet to present Assange as a Trump supporter?

SM: Absolutely. They completely distorted that interview, putting into his mouth things he never said. No one paid any attention to my protests. They were focused on their own interpretations. Finally it took Glenn Greenwald to expose this. The Guardian was forced to amend their article.

DB: How does this throw a spotlight on the political realities faced by Assange in detention?

SM: I have been there from the beginning so I have seen all kinds of attacks on Julian, with high-profile reporters and the international media just parroting what the Pentagon was saying; That Wikileaks had blood on its hands because they exposed the names of Afghan informants. When the US government began complaining that WikiLeaks was putting diplomats at risk, once again the media adopted the government position. The latest is they are crucifying Julian because he has not published Russian documents, saying that he is a Russian spy, etc. But I can tell you that WikiLeaks is obsessed about publishing, they will publish whatever they can get.

There is no way they can kill Julian Assange, it is not possible. We are in Europe, they cannot get to him with drones. But they can certainly destroy his reputation. And when it comes to journalism, reputation is everything.

RC: With all of its power and influence, why are the US government and its allies so obsessed with this one individual?

SM: Julian was able to hit them very hard, to expose them, to expose their

secrets. Here you have an organization exposing the truth behind two wars with facts, without resorting to any propaganda. Never before have they faced such revelations. I can well imagine they are furious.

DB: Why do you think it is so important that Julian Assange be freed and allowed to continue his work?

SM: Access to information is crucial for democracy. Take Afghanistan, we have been there since 2001 and what do we know about what has been going on there? It took Edward Snowden to expose the NSA. Before that we knew very little. This kind of information is crucial for our democracy. Unauthorized disclosures are crucial in the case of democracies and in the case of regimes. WikiLeaks is taking huge legal and extralegal risks to get this information out.

RC: The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has determined that Julian Assange is in fact being arbitrarily detained, that he is a political prisoner and must be released and compensated for all that he has been through. The British have yet to comply with this finding.

SM: This sends a terrible message to other countries which are holding people under arbitrary detention. What can the UK say to Iran or other rogue nations when they detain journalists or political and human rights activists? How can the UK say anything when they have a very high-profile editor under arbitrary detention in London?

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
