

7 January 2018

## Julian Assange — Still Under Siege in London

**No charges, no freedom • Washington’s ominous shadow**

**The uses of Russophobia • Signs of stress**

**Impunity for Swedish injustice**

Over half a year has passed since an unaccountable Swedish prosecutor discontinued her protracted judicial pursuit of Julian Assange, and by rights that should have freed him to emerge from confinement. But he remains under siege by British authorities in the London embassy of Ecuador, where he was granted refuge in June of 2012 and has been cooped up ever since.

It was on 19 May 2017 that prosecutor Marianne Ny announced that she was abandoning — at least for the time being — the malfeasant investigation of Assange which she had initiated in September 2010. The reasons she gave for doing so were as spurious as the vaguely articulated grounds for the investigation. But the European Arrest Warrant issued at her request has been cancelled, thereby eliminating the specific threat that had impelled Assange to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy.

In doing that, however, he had supplied the pretext for another warrant — the one issued by Westminster Magistrates’ Court for violating his bail conditions when he failed to surrender to the court on 29 June 2012. But it would have been rather difficult for him to comply, given that he had entered the Ecuadorian embassy ten days prior to that date and was awaiting a decision on his request for political asylum.

More to the point, the court business to be conducted on 29 June 2012 was based entirely on the European Arrest Warrant which has now been cancelled. Assange’s failure to appear in court has thus become irrelevant.

Nevertheless, British officials have announced their determination to exploit the Magistrates’ Court warrant: “The Metropolitan Police Service is obliged to execute that warrant should [Julian Assange] leave the Embassy.”<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, that interpretation of police duty has been questioned. As noted by Ben Griffin of Veterans For Peace UK, “The situation as it stands is that there is no case to answer in Sweden [except for] a warrant that no longer exists. The Metropolitan Police should drop their claim of arrest and allow Julian Assange to leave the embassy.”<sup>2</sup>

<b>Neutralizing Assange</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Russophobia madness</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Complicit media</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Worse than prison</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Trouble in Ecuador</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The work continues</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Perils of diversifying</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Signs of stress</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Meanwhile, in Sweden...</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Critical legal experts</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Unlawful confinement</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Dereliction of duty</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Angry young women</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>From neutrality to NATO</b>	<b>27</b>

The same opinion was expressed by Ecuador's foreign minister: "Given that the European arrest warrant no longer holds, Ecuador will now be intensifying its diplomatic efforts with the UK so that Julian Assange can gain safe passage in order to enjoy his asylum in Ecuador."<sup>3</sup>

There have been some faint indications that negotiations have commenced, but nothing has been made public to date. Presumably the main impediment to a successful outcome is the evident unwillingness of the U.K. government, presumably acting on behalf of the United States, to in any way facilitate the liberation of Julian Assange. One potentially complicating factor is the current political chaos in Ecuador (see p. 9).

### **Discredit and smear**

Even if the issue of the lingering warrant is eventually resolved, that will do nothing to eliminate a much greater threat — the vengeful wrath of the United States. That has been the primary concern of Julian Assange and his associates all along — prior to and all during the judicial mess contrived by the Swedish prosecutor.

The U.S. security apparatus began targeting WikiLeaks soon after it was launched in 2006. A document prepared by the Pentagon in 2008 "foretold a detailed plan to discredit WikiLeaks and smear Assange personally".<sup>4</sup> The resources devoted to that and related purposes have steadily expanded to include thousands of security personnel in the United States and collaborating nations.

Those collaborators include Sweden, the U.K. and even Assange's homeland of Australia, whose Washington embassy has characterized the U.S. investigation of Assange and WikiLeaks as "unprecedented both in its scale and nature".<sup>5</sup> That has

### **The Stockholm–London–Washington Connection**

Julian Assange's journey to the Ecuadorian embassy in London began in Stockholm, where in 2010 he was questioned on suspicion of "minor rape" and other sexual offences against two women. Those suspicions were quickly dismissed by an experienced prosecutor, but taken up again by another prosecutor at the urging of a disgraced lawyer-politician.

Though not required to do so, Assange remained in Sweden in order to co-operate in the investigation which, however, was inexplicably delayed. After waiting in vain for over a month, he departed for London with the consent of the second prosecutor — who then promptly ordered his arrest.

Acting on her behalf, British officials attempted to arrange the extradition of Assange to Sweden, a process that dragged on for over six years. Since the Swedish arrest warrant was cancelled in May of 2017 (see above), U.K. authorities have continued the siege of the Ecuadorian embassy for their own purposes, which are presumably identical with those of the United States.

Ostensibly a legal matter, it is primarily a political drama which is almost certainly being directed from Washington. The Land of the Free is anxious to capture and severely punish Julian Assange for his remarkable success in exposing secrets concerning war crimes, etc.. That work is conducted primarily via WikiLeaks, a web-based information service of which he is the editor, co-ordinator and public face.

For details, see *Assange & Sweden* at [www.nnn.se/nordic/assange.htm](http://www.nnn.se/nordic/assange.htm)

not, however, elicited a sympathetic response from the Australian government which has treated Assange more like a traitor or an enemy agent than a citizen in need of protection and support.

Animosity toward Assange intensified in April 2010, when WikiLeaks began publishing a series of revelations about U.S. transgressions in Iraq and Afghanistan. That triggered a barrage of condemnation by leading figures in the United States — not for the crimes but for their exposure — and demands that Assange be tracked down and “neutralized” by lengthy imprisonment or some other means, including assassination.

It was partly to elude such a fate that Assange visited Sweden in August 2010, when his brief encounters with two young women began the strange sequence of events which led to his current predicament.<sup>6</sup>

### “Hostile intelligence service”

Public statements of intent to capture and harm Assange declined after he was ensnared in the Swedish-British extradition intrigues, most likely to make it easier for courts and commentators to pretend that he had nothing to fear from the United States. But there has been no apparent decline in efforts to investigate and discredit WikiLeaks.

Among other things, federal prosecutors have been fishing for one or more indictable offences, with a grand jury that has been deliberating since at least 2010. The outcome is essentially guaranteed; for, as a retired federal judge has noted: “Today, the grand jury is the total captive of the prosecutor who, if he is candid, will concede that he can indict anybody, at any time, for almost anything, before any grand jury.”<sup>7</sup> There have been unconfirmed but credible reports that criminal charges against Assange have already been prepared, but have yet to be made public.<sup>8</sup>

There was some speculation that things would change when Donald Trump became president at the start of this year. But the only detectable change thus far has been an escalation of threats and rhetorical onslaughts, such as those trumpeted by the new head of the Central Intelligence Agency in April 2017. Labelling WikiLeaks as “a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia”, Director Mike Pompeo argued that “we have to recognize that we can no longer allow Assange and his colleagues the latitude to use free speech values against us.... To give them the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. It ends now.”<sup>9</sup>



*CIA Director Mike Pompeo*

There was more in the same spirit, but Pompeo neglected to mention that during the presidential campaign he had joined Trump in praising WikiLeaks for its disclosures of compromising materials from the rival campaign of Hillary Clinton.

The CIA director was soon followed by Trump’s attorney general (minister of justice), Jeff Sessions, who stated that arresting Assange “is a priority. We’ve already begun to step up our efforts and whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail.”<sup>10</sup>

*“It would be foolish to dismiss the notion that powerful elements in the U.S. government would resort to almost any means to get their hands on Assange and, in effect, lynch him.”*

## **Presumptive collaboration**

There is no reason to doubt that the British government is eager and willing to turn Assange over to the U.S. — although both governments have thus far refused to confirm or deny that a formal extradition request has been submitted.

If it fails to “neutralize” Assange by legal means, the U.S. government has no qualms about employing less decorous alternatives. As noted by former CIA analyst David MacMichael:

“The trend in current ‘national security’ legislation grants the administration the authority to arrest and imprison, indefinitely and without trial, both citizens and non-citizens of the U.S. anywhere on the ‘world battlefield’. Now the administration has even claimed the right to murder U.S. citizens whom it designates as threats to national security.

“These and related developments indicate that it would be foolish to dismiss the notion that powerful elements in the U.S. government would resort to almost any means to get their hands on Assange [an Australian citizen] and, in effect, lynch him.”<sup>11</sup>

This raises the question if it will ever be possible for Assange to safely leave the Ecuadorian embassy, even if the British government — for some as yet indiscernible reason — promises not to arrest him if he does. Can such a promise from such a source be trusted? Would it ensure that the U.S. government would behave with equal restraint? Would some new pretext for arresting Assange be concocted as soon as he stepped outside the embassy? (Perhaps he might be found to have molested a policewoman standing by the door.)

The U.S. government has on countless occasions demonstrated that it does not feel constrained by laws, solemn agreements or common decency. As one example of the “any other means” it is prepared to employ: In 2013 an airplane carrying Bolivian president Evo Morales was forced to land in Vienna and detained for half a day, due to U.S. suspicions that fugitive whistleblower Edward Snowden was also on board.<sup>12</sup>

Assuming that Julian Assange could be transported to a British airport without being kidnapped or assassinated, it is a long way through the air to the relative safety of asylum in Ecuador. Former “economic hitman” John Perkins has noted that, not least in Latin America, prominent figures who defy the United States appear to experience an unusually high rate of death by aviation accident.<sup>13</sup>

That is just one of the serious and quite plausible risks to which Julian Assange is subject — and which are arbitrarily dismissed as figments of paranoia, excuses for evading justice, etc., by unwell-wishers and apologists for abuses of power by U.S., British and Swedish governments.

It all suggests that Assange’s embassy confinement may be prolonged for quite some time — although his attorneys and Ecuadorian officials have expressed hopes that his liberation can be negotiated and guaranteed. In the meantime, the U.S. and its accomplices continue their self-described efforts to “discredit WikiLeaks and smear Assange personally”.

## Neutralization by other means

The main propaganda theme since the autumn of 2016 has been that Assange and WikiLeaks have been colluding with Russia to undermine Western democracy and harm the “national security interests” of the U.S. and its allies. It was then that WikiLeaks published evidence that the Democratic Party had been systematically corrupted to ensure the nomination of Hillary Clinton as the party’s candidate for president in the forthcoming election.

As the evidence was extensive and indisputable, the fairly predictable response of Clinton and her co-conspirators was to ignore the proof of their misdeeds and attack the messenger. They claimed that the digital evidence had been hacked and then leaked to WikiLeaks by Russian operatives seeking to prevent the election of Clinton and promote her opponent, Donald Trump. That completely unfounded accusation was repeated with mounting intensity after Trump won the election, to the surprise of nearly everyone (including Julian Assange and perhaps himself).

Not the slightest evidence of any Russia-WikiLeaks-Trump collusion has been presented. But the canard has been incessantly propagated by the mainstream press and now appears to have been incorporated into the conventional wisdom, as in the following demonstration of journalistic prowess by the *New York Times*:

United States officials say they believe with a high degree of confidence that the Democratic Party material was hacked by the Russian government, and suspect that the codes may have been stolen by the Russians as well. That raises a question: Has WikiLeaks become a laundering machine for compromising material gathered by Russian spies? And more broadly, what precisely is the relationship between Mr. Assange and Mr. Putin’s Kremlin?

Those questions are made all the more pointed by Russia’s prominent place in the American presidential election campaign. Mr. Putin, who clashed repeatedly with Mrs. Clinton when she was secretary of state, has publicly praised Mr. Trump, who has returned the compliment...

Whether by conviction, convenience or coincidence, WikiLeaks’ document releases, along with many of Mr. Assange’s statements, have often benefited Russia, at the expense of the West.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, it may now be stated with a high degree of confidence that the data in question “was copied onto a storage device at a speed that far exceeds an Internet capability for a remote hack” (the method supposedly used for the Russian “theft”). Thus, “the reason the U.S. government lacks conclusive evidence of a transfer of a ‘Russian hack’ to WikiLeaks is because there was no such transfer”.

That is the conclusion of an independent panel consisting of 17 former CIA analysts and other intelligence experts, including a former technical director at the National Security Agency and a retired program manager for information technology at IBM.

The panel also notes that the CIA has the technical capacity to carry out false flag hacks so that they appear to have been conducted by Russia or any other country. They cite one such incident in June 2016 which “suggests the start of a preemptive move to associate Russia with anything WikiLeaks might have been about to publish and to ‘show’ that it came from a Russian hack.”<sup>15</sup>

### Priming the Media Pump to Gush “Russian Meddling”

The forensics reflect what seems to have been a desperate effort to 'blame the Russians' for publishing highly embarrassing DNC emails three days before the Democratic convention last July. Since the content of the DNC emails reeked of pro-Clinton bias, her campaign saw an overriding need to divert attention from content to provenance — as in, who “hacked” those DNC emails? The campaign was enthusiastically supported by compliant “mainstream” media; they are still on a roll.

“The Russians” were the ideal culprit. And, after WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange announced on June 12, 2016, “We have emails related to Hillary Clinton which are pending publication,” her campaign had more than a month before the convention to insert its own “forensic facts” and prime the media pump to put the blame on “Russian meddling.” Mrs. Clinton’s PR chief Jennifer Palmieri has explained how she used golf carts to make the rounds at the convention. She wrote that her “mission was to get the press to focus on something even we found difficult to process: the prospect that Russia had not only hacked and stolen emails from the DNC, but that it had done so to help Donald Trump and hurt Hillary Clinton.”

— *Veteran Intelligence Officials for Sanity*<sup>16</sup>

### Tools of Clintonian intelligence

It is unlikely that the knowledge offered by the 17 intelligence experts is widely shared, given that the *New York Times* and most other media have chosen not to report it. In contrast, there do not appear to be any unsubstantiated ravings by Hillary Clinton which they are unwilling to disseminate. She achieved a sort of climax in October 2017 when public TV in Assange’s homeland provided her with a sympathetic platform to proclaim that:

“He is very clearly a tool of Russian intelligence.... Assange has become a kind of nihilistic opportunist who does the bidding of a dictator.... WikiLeaks is unfortunately now practically a fully owned subsidiary of Russian intelligence.... There was a concerted operation between WikiLeaks and Russia” whose president “wants to destabilise democracy. He wants to undermine America”, etc., etc.

Clinton was permitted to carry on like this for three quarters of an hour without challenge or contradiction by her host, who instead fed her sympathetic questions such as: “No one could fail to be moved by the pain on your face [when Trump was inaugurated].... Do you remember how visceral it was for you?”

Afterwards, the programme’s executive producer explained on Twitter that, “Assange is Putin’s bitch. We all know it!” (“Bitch” is an apparent allusion to the phenomenon of male sexual servitude in prisons.)<sup>17</sup>

Clinton’s performance on Australian public TV was clearly a well-prepared event that was widely reported by international media. During the interview she hinted at the range and scope of the propaganda apparatus at her disposal by referring to “the Atlantic Alliance and we consider Australia kind of an extension of that”. (Note the collective “we” and the geographically curious linkage of Australia with the Atlantic Ocean.)



*Hillary Clinton's groundless accusations against Julian Assange on Australian TV were presumably intended and pre-arranged to be given widespread coverage around the world. This headline in Sweden's leading newspaper reads: "Clinton calls Assange a tool used by Putin" (Dagens Nyheter, 16 October 2017).*

Clinton's Australian interview is hardly a unique abuse of media power to malign Julian Assange. As noted by Jonathan Cook, formerly a reporter with *The Guardian* and now one of its most incisive critics:

"Assange was convicted by the British corporate media, including its supposedly liberal outfits, from the moment allegations of sexual offences in Sweden surfaced [in 2010]. August media outlets like the BBC, which carefully presume innocence in prosecutions of those accused of everyday crimes, repeatedly made grossly erroneous claims about Assange, including that he had been charged with rape when no charges have yet been laid...."

"What has been so infuriating about the coverage of Assange's case is that supposedly critical journalists have simply peddled allegations and arguments advanced by the parties involved — the UK, Sweden, and the United States — without making even cursory efforts to check them."<sup>18</sup>

The same pattern of complicity is apparent throughout the U.S. empire, whose dominant media have lately been spinning the tale of "Russiagate" which serves at least three purposes: further demonizing Russia and its president; discrediting Assange and WikiLeaks; and confounding the stated intent of President Trump to improve U.S. relations with Russia.

"Recklessness and falsity is now a clear and highly disturbing trend — one could say a constant — when it comes to reporting on Trump, Russia and WikiLeaks", observes journalist Glenn Greenwald.<sup>19</sup>

## The Rampant Jealousy of Mainstream Media

In the years I have known Julian Assange, I have watched a vituperative personal campaign try to stop him and WikiLeaks. It has been a frontal assault on whistle-blowing, on free speech and free journalism, all of which are now under sustained attack from governments and corporate internet controllers.

The first serious attacks on Assange came from *The Guardian*, which, like a spurned lover, turned on its besieged former source, having hugely profited from WikiLeaks' disclosures. With not a penny going to Assange or WikiLeaks, a *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie deal. Assange was portrayed as "callous" and a "damaged personality".

It was as if a rampant jealousy could not accept that his remarkable achievements stood in marked contrast to that of his detractors in the "mainstream" media. It is like watching the guardians of the *status quo*, regardless of age, struggling to silence real dissent and prevent the emergence of the new and hopeful.

— John Pilger<sup>20</sup>

### Worse than prison

Over five and a half years have passed since Julian Assange entered Ecuador's small London embassy to seek asylum. Since then he has never set foot outside.

The total area of the embassy is 200 square metres, of which 30 m<sup>2</sup> has been made available to Assange for routine use. His access to sunlight and open air has been limited to occasional appearances on a tiny ground-floor balcony facing a busy street and shaded by surrounding buildings.

In some ways his conditions are worse than those of a normal prison, where one hour of outdoor exercise is the legal minimum. Requests to permit that minimum, for example on the roof of an adjacent building, have been denied by British authorities, who have also denied requests for safe passage to and from treatment for serious medical and dental problems.

He has been subjected to continual and threatening surveillance, visitors have been harassed, telephones have been bugged, etc.

The result, clearly intended by British authorities, is an unhealthy existence which may be expected to have negative long-term consequences. According to a health assessment issued in 2015:

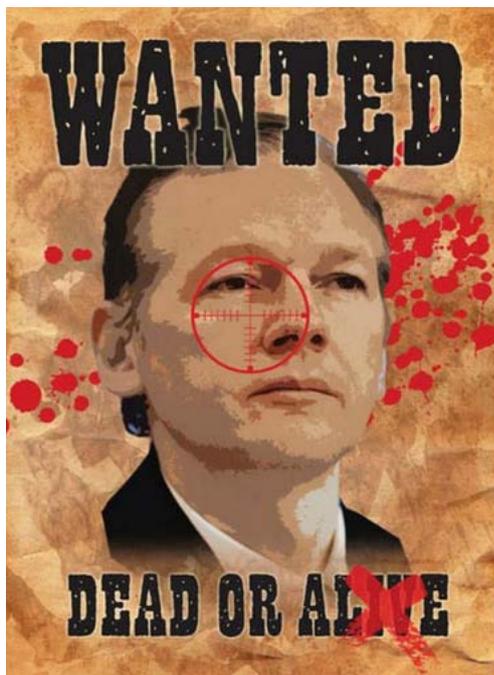
"It is important to consider that from a psychological and social perspective Mr. Assange has been subject to serious restrictions on his liberty from as long ago as 2010 and, equally importantly, that there is no end in sight... [There is] convincing evidence that the indeterminacy of an indefinite detention creates a degree of uncertainty, unpredictability, and uncontrollability that causes severe harm in healthy individuals independent of other aspects or conditions of detention. The harmful psychological and physical effects of indefinite detention include.... pathological levels of stress that have damaging effects on the core physiologic functions of the immune and cardiovascular systems, as well on the central nervous system."



*The balcony of the Ecuadorian embassy, from which Julian Assange can get an occasional glimpse of the sky above Hans Crescent in London.*

The assessment indicates that some damaging effects were already evident: “All of the interviewees made reference to the fact Mr Assange was becoming increasingly introverted. One put it in the following way: “He is an extremely sad person. He doesn’t laugh as he did. In the beginning he was more sociable. There are times when he seems to forget about eating’.”

In conclusion: “Mr. Assange needs — at the bare minimum — access to fresh air, sunlight and exercise space on a daily basis.... The effects of the situation on Mr. Assange's health and well-being are serious and the risks will most certainly escalate with the potential to becoming life threatening if current conditions persist.”<sup>21</sup>



*Poster issued by Washington Times* <sup>23</sup>

That was over two years ago; but his living conditions remain unchanged.

Health concerns were also cited by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in its January 2016 finding that Assange’s human rights have been violated by Sweden and the U.K., and that he should immediately be released: “It is valid to assume, after 5 years of deprivation of liberty, Mr. Assange’s health could have been deteriorated to a level that anything more than a superficial illness would put his health at a serious risk and he was denied access to a medical institution for a proper diagnosis....”<sup>22</sup>

It may also be assumed that his worse-than-prison existence does not make it easier to ignore the unrelenting animosity of hostile journalists, politicians and other detractors. For many of them, Assange appears to serve

as a sort of Rorschach test for the expression of perverse tendencies. To cite but a few examples: "Assange is Putin's bitch. We all know it!" (see p. 6); "Assange stands forever discredited by his moral evasions and contempt for the law" (*The Times*); and "Julian Assange wants us to see him as a selfless seeker of truth. But the reality... is that he is actually greasy, greedy, childish, secretive and 'probably a little mad'" (*The Mail on Sunday*).

Then there are the so-called social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which to a large extent have become cesspools of ignorance, hatred, vile gossip and unfounded accusations.

## Broken promises

Another sadly common source of distress is betrayal by friends and allies. A recent example affecting Assange has been provided by Laura Poitras a film-maker whose *Citizenfour*, about whistleblower Edward Snowden, won the 2015 Academy Award for best documentary. An early supporter of WikiLeaks, in 2010 she was granted nearly unlimited access to Julian Assange for a documentary that was issued in 2017.

Entitled *Risk*, the film is an amorphous construction which one reviewer found to be "self-involved... and filled with unfounded innuendo". Concerning Assange, "You know the story line: he's an egotist, control-freak, and sexual predator mostly interested in fame and notoriety."<sup>24</sup>

Four female lawyers for WikiLeaks and Assange have criticized Poitras for serious violations of the agreement by which the documentary was made:

"The film serves to undermine WikiLeaks just as the Trump administration has announced that it intends to prosecute its journalists, editors and associates....

"Poitras has also violated her unambiguous promise to the subjects of the film that they would have an opportunity to review the film in advance and request changes, and that they could decline to appear if they or their lawyers felt that the movie put them at risk.

"Had the filmmaker not agreed to these express conditions, WikiLeaks' staff would not have allowed themselves to be filmed in the first place....

"Prior to its initial U.S. release, seven of the participants submitted non-consent forms to the producers advising Poitras and her team that they did not want to appear in the film. Regardless, Poitras went ahead and released it....

"Our second major concern about *Risk* is the way the focus of the film has been radically altered from a broadly sympathetic portrayal of WikiLeaks' work and the attacks against its staff by the U.S. government to an ill-defined indictment of the 'culture of sexism' online....

"But if sexism [has become] the story, it is because Poitras has chosen to focus on it....

"*Risk* might win attention for Poitras by pandering to tabloid narratives about its subjects, but it has done a great disservice to her fellow documentarians, and has profoundly betrayed her friends, her colleagues and her journalistic integrity."<sup>25</sup>

One of the four lawyers, Melinda Taylor, later added: "It is not just the WikiLeaks staff who are put at risk; it is also the sources and persons they worked with... They were participating in this documentary under the strict conditions that they... will have a right to give input and to withdraw as well as to voice their concerns. None of this was respected."<sup>26</sup>

To these criticisms, Poitras and her co-producers responded: “In WikiLeaks’ efforts to prevent the distribution of *Risk*, they are using the very tactics often used against them — legal threats, false security claims, underhanded personal attacks, misdirection — and with the same intentions: to suppress information and silence speech.”<sup>27</sup>

That was the sort of response to be anticipated; and it *was* anticipated by the four critical lawyers when they wrote: “To be clear: our objections are not about censorship. WikiLeaks remains an unwavering advocate for freedom of expression. This is about safety. It is about protecting journalistic sources. It is about personal and professional integrity, and honoring contractual obligations.”<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the film has been widely distributed via cinemas and television, including Swedish public TV which described it as “A study in Julian Assange’s mounting paranoia”.<sup>29</sup>

## Trouble in Ecuador

A potentially more serious concern for refugee Assange is the current political chaos in Ecuador, whose reform government of President Rafael Correa defied the United States by granting him asylum in 2010. It was expected that little would change when Lenin Moreno was elected to succeed Correa in April 2017.

Ostensibly a close politically ally of Correa, and having served as vice president during 2007–2013, it was assumed that Moreno would continue the policies of his predecessor. Since taking office, however, he has been dismantling those policies, leading Correa to conclude that Moreno is, “a wolf in sheep’s clothing.... Moreno deceived me for ten years. He is a person who was with the opposition”.<sup>30</sup> It may be assumed that the opposition is amply financed and strongly influenced by the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Correa and his supporters, who are many, are now struggling to regain control of national politics. But the eventual outcome is far from certain and, in the meantime, Moreno remains the legally elected president.

Thus far, the political turmoil in Ecuador has not resulted in any alteration of Assange’s status in the London embassy. Moreno has reaffirmed his government’s commitment to providing him with asylum “as long as we assume his life may be in danger”. But there is little doubt that Moreno is conspiring with the U.S. government in other matters, and it is far from unthinkable that he may later choose to assume that the mortal danger has passed.

For the present, Moreno contents himself with occasional stern warnings for Assange “not to interfere in Ecuadorian politics, nor in the politics of its allies.... His status does not allow him to talk about the politics of any country, let alone ours”.

Assange’s reply: “Ecuadorians can be confident that if WikiLeaks receives evidence of corruption in Ecuador it will be published.”<sup>32</sup>

One especially sore point is Assange’s public embrace of the Catalanian independence movement (see below). Citing the importance of good relations with Spain, Moreno has said that, “We gave him asylum but we have asked him in a cordial way to stop commenting on the politics of Ecuador and that of friendly countries because his status as an asylum seeker does not allow it. So he is surpassing that condition.”

“We do not want to intervene under any circumstances with respect to Catalonia,” Moreno has declared, citing the importance of maintaining good relations with Spain.



*Happier times: Julian Assange meets with Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño in Ecuador's London embassy in June 2013. (Foreign Ministry of Ecuador)*

“We have reminded Mr Assange that he has no reason to interfere in Ecuadorian politics because his status does not allow it. Nor in that of nations that are our friends.”

Undaunted, Assange replied: “If President Moreno wants to gag my reporting of human rights abuses in Spain he should say so explicitly — together with the legal basis.”<sup>33</sup>

The conflict between the president of Ecuador and the embassy's troublesome guest is unlikely to end anytime soon, and may very well escalate. A significant factor in the eventual outcome is the power struggle between presidents Correa and Moreno. Among other things, that is likely to affect negotiations with British authorities concerning the release of Assange from confinement.

## **The work continues**

The foregoing is far from a thorough review of the strains and stresses confronted by Julian Assange since his fateful visit to Sweden in 2010. Many people have experienced similar difficulties, of course, but seldom in such variety and multitude — nor while confined for years in a small sunless space under constant threat from a murderous superpower, with no end in sight.

Despite all that, Assange has demonstrated an extraordinary resilience and working capacity. As one associate interviewed for the above-noted health assessment (p. 8) observed: “Assange is very strong because, if it was me, I would give myself up to the authorities to take me to a proper prison where I can get fresh air and look up and see the sky.”

No doubt to the dismay of his enemies, Assange has continued to lead WikiLeaks by means of the Internet, phone calls and frequent visits to the London embassy by associates and collaborators. Leaks published during his five-and-a-half years of arbitrary detention include:

**Syria Files:** More than two million emails from Syrian political figures, ministries and associated companies, dating from August 2006 to March 2012.

**Spy Files:** Copies of surveillance malware used by intelligence agencies around the world to spy on journalists, political dissidents and others.

**NSA World Spying:** Documents of the U.S. National Security Agency revealing its surveillance activities in France, Germany, Brazil and Japan. Targets include heads of state, foreign ministries and major corporations.

**Final text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP):** Documents relating to negotiations of the TPP, a proposed trade agreement involving twelve countries and over forty percent of world GNP.

**Hillary Leaks:** Tens of thousands of e-mails and attachments from the accounts of key figures involved in the undemocratic process to secure the nomination of Hillary Clinton as the Democratic Party's candidate in the 2016 election.

**Vault 7:** The largest ever publication of confidential CIA documents, including details on more than one thousand hacking systems, trojans, viruses, and other "weaponized" malware developed by the agency for its various activities around the world.

There is more and all of it is presented on the WikiLeaks website at <https://www.wikileaks.org/-Leaks-.html>

Assange has not accomplished all of that alone, of course. It involves reviewing, verifying, editing and processing vast quantities of information which is often of an esoteric nature. The numbers and identities of those who perform the work have not been disclosed and, inevitably, that has provoked some comment on the apparent contradiction of an anti-secrecy organization resorting to secrecy in its own affairs.

But even WikiLeaks' critics seem capable of understanding the need to shield its staff and collaborators from recriminations by the U.S. government and other powerful interests seeking revenge. That need has been demonstrated by the fates of Bradley/Chelsea Manning and Barrett Brown<sup>34</sup> who have suffered imprisonment and other indignities for their involvement with WikiLeaks. There have also been numerous threats and acts of intimidation against Assange supporters and associates, including the U.S. justice minister's declaration of intent to "put some people in jail".

## Branching out

The role of Julian Assange in WikiLeaks has been described as follows: "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."<sup>35</sup>

That is a fairly accurate description, except that Assange does not always speak to sources. They may and often do submit information via a secure web-based procedure which is designed to protect their identities — even from Assange and WikiLeaks — and has thus far succeeded in doing so. (A few sources have been disclosed by other means, including their own indiscreet revelations to third parties.)

There is another important exception: As his fame/notoriety and the impact of WikiLeaks have grown, Assange has become something more than an editor. He is now an influential public figure whose views on a variety of subjects are often sought by and freely offered to other media. One of those subjects is Catalonia, and Assange's

pronouncements — in support of that region's independence movement and in condemnation of the Spanish government's efforts to suppress it — are a source of his above-noted conflict with Ecuador's President Moreno.

It is also a cause of perplexity among Assange supporters and other observers who question what Catalanian independence has to do with Assange's role as editor of WikiLeaks. The answer appears to be: Not very much — although the issue is clearly of great personal interest to Assange, who has described it as a "Gandhian struggle".<sup>36</sup>

In any event, Assange's public stature appears to be enhanced when, for example, the governments of Spain and Ecuador worry about his presumptive power to influence events in Catalonia, or when evidence-bereft politicians and journalists declare him guilty of forming an evil triumvirate with Trump and Putin, etc.

## Cosy relationship

There are, however, pitfalls associated with engaging in extra-editorial activities. That became apparent in November 2017 when *The Atlantic* gave Assange a taste of his own medicine by publishing leaked or hacked correspondence between him (and possibly one or more WikiLeaks associates) with Donald Trump Jr.

According to *The Atlantic*, "They are part of a long — and largely one-sided [i.e. from Assange/WikiLeaks to Trump Jr.] — correspondence between WikiLeaks and the president's son that continued until at least July 2017". The exchanges suggested a familiar and co-operative relationship, as in these excerpts from messages to Trump Jr.:

"A PAC run anti-Trump site putintrump.org is about to launch. The PAC is a recycled pro-Iraq war PAC. We have guessed the password. It is 'putintrump.' See 'About' for who is behind it. Any comments?"

"Hey Don. We have an unusual idea. Leak us one or more of your father's tax returns.... If we publish them it will dramatically improve the perception of our impartiality. That means that the vast amount of stuff that we are publishing on Clinton will have much higher impact, because it won't be perceived as coming from a 'pro-Trump' 'pro-Russia' source. The same for any other negative stuff (documents, recordings) that you think has a decent chance of coming out. Let us put it out."

"Hi Don if your father 'loses' we think it is much more interesting if he DOES NOT concede [sic] and spends time CHALLENGING the media and other types of rigging that occurred — as he has implied that he might do."

"Hi Don. Hope you're doing well! In relation to Mr. Assange: Obama/Clinton placed pressure on Sweden, UK and Australia (his home country) to illicitly go after Mr. Assange. It would be real easy and helpful for your dad [as the new president] to suggest that Australia appoint Assange ambassador to [Washington,] DC.... "They won't do it but it will send the right signals to Australia, UK + Sweden to start following the law and stop bending it to ingratiate themselves with the Clintons."<sup>37</sup>

The correspondence clearly refuted Assange's assurances that he had not sided with Trump and against Clinton during the presidential campaign, thereby adding fuel to the "Russiagate" arson fire (see p. 5). Inevitably, it was taken by critics — now including dismayed, outraged and possibly former supporters — as proof that Assange/WikiLeaks were not, as they claimed, rigorously impartial publishers of reliable

information. The disclosure, facilitated by the use of the insecure medium of Twitter, also wounded WikiLeaks' reputation as a vehicle for secure communication.

Assange tried to explain away the incriminating correspondence as a clever attempt to "beguile" Trump into disclosing income tax returns and other sensitive information. But it was an explanation that rang false, partly because there apparently was no similar correspondence with the Clinton camp. As one sceptic observed: "If true, the attempt to 'beguile' is plainly unbecoming of a self-professed media outlet. More likely, Assange's explanatory narrative is false."<sup>38</sup>

One presumably former WikiLeaks ally is Barrett Brown (see p. 13), whose reaction was that "working with an authoritarian would-be leader to deceive the public is indefensible and disgusting". He noted bitterly that Assange had complained "about the 'slander' of being pro-Trump IN THE ACTUAL COURSE OF COLLABORATING WITH TRUMP."<sup>39</sup>

Brown was far from alone in his condemnation, and there have been numerous other criticisms since WikiLeaks began operating in 2006, including claims that published leaks often fail to protect the identities of "innocent bystanders" who may thereby be exposed to various kinds of risk. A lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union has lamented that it is "becoming harder to identify the principles guiding WikiLeaks. Assange's provocations — his indifference to facilitating information warfare, his willingness to pay for secrets, his encouraging millennials to take C.I.A. internships as 'whistle-blowing opportunities' — were recasting the difficult moral act of exposing institutional abuse as something that began to look like espionage."<sup>40</sup>

Assange has generally dismissed such complaints as invalid and/or ill-intended. That is not an unusual human tendency which may be accentuated in Assange's case: He has himself observed that, "I am a combative person."<sup>41</sup> Also, much or most of the criticism aimed at him has been so malicious, ill-informed and misguided that it should not be difficult to understand any inclination to reject it all, as a psychological survival strategy — especially if one considers the extraordinary stress and peril which has been his lot during the past decade or so.

That sort of understanding seems quite rare in relation to Julian Assange, however. One of the most disturbing aspects of his existence is the abundance of irrational animosity and disdain he has aroused. That may be due in part to his somewhat unusual personality and non-verbal language. He is often accused of being "not normal", and is probably guilty of that sin. It would be otherwise difficult to explain how a relatively impecunious lad from Australia with no powerful connections has managed to accomplish so much and gain so much influence around the world.

Another likely explanation for the peculiar lack of empathy and understanding for Assange in his predicament is that he has dealt with it so effectively. It is a tribute to his mental strength and discipline that he is generally treated as if there were nothing unusual about his circumstances.

But it would be inhuman for anyone to undergo such prolonged hardship without being affected by it, and lately there have been signs of stress and impaired judgement. One example is the disastrous correspondence with Donald Trump Jr. and Assange's apparent failure to recognize its implications.

If it is so that the many years of constant duress are finally beginning to take their toll, the only remarkable thing about it is that it has taken so long to occur.

## Meanwhile, in Sweden...

The grotesque abuse of judicial power which continues to plague Julian Assange began in Sweden on 1 September 2010 — perhaps fittingly, the anniversary of Hitler’s invasion of Poland to launch World War II — when a senior prosecutor named Marianne Ny chose to reopen a case that had been dismissed by a respected colleague, Eva Finné.

Nearly seven years later, on 19 May 2017, prosecutor Ny discontinued her so-called investigation — which had become notorious for its lack of investigation — in a reluctant concession to overwhelming evidence that Eva Finné had been entirely correct when she concluded: “There is no suspicion of any crime whatsoever”.

In the meantime, Assange had been indelibly stigmatised around the world with the label of “rape”, and Marianne Ny had repeatedly violated the ethics and obligations of her office, aided and abetted by numerous other Swedish officials.

It has all served to validate the original judgement of Assange’s attorney, Leif Silbersky: “This is among the worst cases of judicial corruption I have ever seen.... It has damaged my client, his organization and, above all, confidence in Sweden’s system of justice.”<sup>42</sup>

Christophe Marchand, a Belgian attorney who later joined the Assange legal team, concurs: “As a criminal lawyer I’ve never seen such a gross abuse of justice by a prosecutor.”<sup>43</sup>

That is a widely held view among jurists in Sweden and elsewhere.

## Code violations

According to the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure: “At the preliminary investigation, not only circumstances that are not in favour of the suspect, but also circumstances in his favour shall be considered.... The investigation should be conducted so that no person is unnecessarily exposed to suspicion, or put to unnecessary cost or inconvenience. The preliminary investigation shall be conducted as expeditiously as possible.”

The Code also prescribes that “the suspect has the right to be informed of the charges against him in his own language and to be continuously informed of what has emerged from the investigation against him”.<sup>44</sup>

All that and more has been consistently contravened by prosecutor Ny in her pursuit of Julian Assange. Among other things, she:

- Refused to conduct her investigation “as expeditiously as possible”, even though she had herself previously emphasized the special need to do so in cases of suspected sexual crimes.
- Gave her consent for Assange to leave Sweden (after he had voluntarily remained there for over a month in the vain hope of being interviewed), then ordered his arrest on the same day he departed for England.
- For years refused to expedite the investigation by interviewing Assange in London on the grounds that it was not permitted by Swedish law — a blatant lie.
- Refused to provide his attorneys with the alleged evidence against him, including messages between the two alleged victims which provide proof of Assange’s innocence.

- Consistently acted in such a manner that Assange has been “unnecessarily exposed to suspicion” and “put to unnecessary cost [and] inconvenience”.
- Given different explanations to Swedish and British courts regarding her conduct of the case, with the apparent intention of perverting the course of extradition proceedings.

Due to these and other transgressions, there has been an unusual amount of grumbling from the legal professions — although few open and direct expressions of dissent.

### **Authoritative rebuke**

A rare exception was provided by the presiding justice of the supreme court, Stefan Lindskog, during a visit to Australia in 2013. Speaking at a public meeting, Justice Lindskog described the case against Assange as “a mess” and volunteered: “I would like to comment upon the possibility of the prosecutor to go to London. It is possible that the prosecutor could travel to London and interrogate him there. I have no answer to the question of why that hasn’t happened.”<sup>45</sup>

Although he did not mention her by name, it was an unmistakable and highly unusual public rebuke of prosecutor Ny’s mishandling of a case that might come before him at a later date.

Justice Lindskog also published an article in the *Australian Financial Review* with views of Assange and WikiLeaks that were surprisingly favourable, considering the source.

“During my years as a practising lawyer,” he wrote, “I learned to mistrust any organisation, including the state. When people come together and think of themselves as united with a special task or goal, astonishing dynamics can cause strange things to happen. Thus, I think that one shall not presume that the state, or any part of it, is always good. If anything should be presumed at all, it is to the contrary. It is sometimes necessary to view the different authorities of the state as heads of a vicious Hydra....”

“At the end of the day, many years from now, I think Assange will not, even in Sweden, be associated with his efforts to escape the laws of Sweden. He will be thought of as the person who made public some pieces of classified information to the benefit of mankind.

“Crimes against humanity such as the [WikiLeaks images of Iraqi civilians being killed in a] helicopter shooting need to be made known. The good made by leakage of such information cannot be underestimated. It should never be a crime to make crimes of state known.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Purple prosecutor**

The Swedish legal authority who has been the most persistent and effective critic of the prosecutor’s conduct is Brita Sundberg-Weitman, a retired judge and associate professor of international law. She was sceptical about the case against Assange from the very beginning, and two months later — after he had departed for England and Marianne Ny had ordered his arrest — she was certain that there was much amiss.

In an article published in early December 2010 she observed that, “Developments in this case raise many questions. How was [the tabloid] *Expressen* able to learn about the on-duty prosecutor’s decision to order the arrest before it was annulled by senior prosecutor [Eva Finné] the following day? Marianne Ny now says that the purpose

of the arrest which she has called for is to question Assange about the suspicions, but why did that not occur while Assange was still in Sweden? Why reject his offer to be interviewed in England or by video conference, if [as she has stated] she feels that she does not even have enough evidence to charge him with a crime?" Etc....

"The actions of the prosecutor in this matter," concluded Judge Sundberg-Weitman, "definitely do not give the impression that she has tried to limit the injury caused to Assange — rather the contrary.... The way in which it has been handled bears not a little resemblance to the suggestion of the minister of justice [Beatrice Ask] about sending purple-coloured police letters to the homes of suspected sex purchasers 'so that wives and neighbours will find out'....

"The entire world is eagerly awaiting new episodes of this bizarre soap opera."<sup>47</sup>

One important episode was enacted in a British courtroom two months later, in early February 2011 — the initial hearing concerning prosecutor Ny's request for the extradition of Assange to Sweden. Judge Sundberg-Weitman was among the expert witnesses and her testimony included the following:

"There have been a number of clear breaches of procedure in the handling of Mr. Assange's case. First, the initial Prosecutor, Maria Kjellstrand, confirmed Mr. Assange's identity and the nature of the allegations against him to the tabloid newspaper, *Expressen*, on the same day that the complaint was made."

That was in violation of Swedish law, noted Judge Sundberg-Weitman; and even though prosecutor Eva Finné overruled Ms. Kjellstrand's decision to initiate the rape investigation, "damage from the unfair publicity had already been done."



*Photo from an article in New Zealand's The Standard entitled, "Marianne Ny: Making an arse of Swedish law"<sup>48</sup>*

### **Radical feminists in action**

The retired judge noted further that the case had been reopened at the initiative of lawyer Claes Borgström who "can be described as an ultra radical feminist. He is also a politician whose platform is associated with radical feminist activism and has developed a legal practice around acting for complainants in rape cases. Mr. Borgström has appeared on numerous occasions in Swedish and international media condemning Mr. Assange.

"Like Mr. Borgström, Ms. Ny is a well-known radical feminist.... Ms. Ny has stated that she believes imprisoning [men accused of assaulting women] has a positive effect, 'even in cases where the perpetrator is prosecuted but not convicted'... It is also informative, in regards to the presumption of innocence, that she uses the term 'perpetrator' rather than 'defendant' or 'suspect' in discussing criminal investigation in rape cases....

“Marianne Ny, unlike other prosecutors, has made various statements... in which she regards the prosecution of men, even without sufficient evidence, as in the public interest *‘pour encourager les autres’*. She is a high profile prosecutor who is also a crusader on gender issues, and the international attention that this case has received may have made her more intransigent and, in my view, over-harsh and disproportionate in attacking Mr. Assange.”

Among other issues addressed by Judge Sundberg-Weitman, she confirmed that there was nothing in Swedish law to prevent prosecutor Ny from obtaining the evidence she claimed to be seeking with a visit to London or the use of international communication technology. She also stated her opinion that the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure had been violated “in that Ms. Ny’s conduct of the investigation has ‘unnecessarily exposed [Mr. Assange] to suspicion’ and put him at ‘unnecessary cost and inconvenience’.”<sup>49</sup>

Everything that has happened during the nearly seven years since this testimony has served to confirm and strengthen it, as she has explained in several articles. The well-founded arguments of Judge Sundberg-Weitman have been disseminated by various Internet forums and other alternative media. But they are not, to put it mildly, popular with Sweden’s political and media establishments, which have generally shut their eyes and minds to the abundant evidence of Assange’s innocence and persecution — thereby contributing to that persecution.

### **Crime against decency**

In addition to the two judges cited above, a few practicing lawyers have publicly denounced the prosecution of Assange. One of them is Svante Thorsell, who has pointed out that “Sweden distinguishes itself in the European Union by the absence of a time limit on preliminary investigation. The law specifies only that it should be conducted as expeditiously as possible.... Like others [similarly affected], Assange has to put up with being investigated as long as it suits the prosecutor.”

This violates the European Convention on Human Rights which is directly applicable to Swedish law, argues Thorsell. “The justice system of Sweden is unique in that we lack a rule concerning the maximum amount of time that someone may be detained prior to trial....

“There is something rotten with the Assange case,” states attorney Thorsell. “Why is he *de facto* deprived of freedom? Why has the preliminary investigation not been concluded? The answer is to be found in the Foreign Ministry, alas, not in the judicial system..... If Sweden is not accommodating in the Assange case, we can be frozen out of information exchanges with U.S. intelligence agencies and be barred from purchasing military technology, according to those who know.”

As for prosecutor Ny’s refusal to interview Assange in London, “Her incomprehensible explanation has been that there are formal obstacles for the Swedish state to conduct interrogations in Great Britain. That is not correct. During the same period [of her refusal] Swedish police have conducted 44 interviews on British soil.... The prosecutors inaction is a crime against decency.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Critical colleague**

Possibly the most painful criticism of Marianne Ny’s conduct has been authored by a professional colleague, retired prosecutor Rolf Hillegren. In several articles published in leading publications he has condemned her conduct of the case and refuted her attempts or non-attempts to justify it.

“Wrong grounds for cancellation — prosecutor wants to hide her shortcomings” was the headline of Hillegren’s reaction to Marianne Ny’s long overdue decision in May 2017 to discontinue her so-called investigation.

“After nearly seven years,” noted Hillegren, “prosecutor Marianne Ny has finally shut down the preliminary investigation of Julian Assange — an investigation that should never have been reopened after being dismissed by an experienced senior prosecutor.

“My reason for stating that is very simple: There is no evidence, and in such cases no investigation should be conducted.”

Once reopened, the investigation stood still for years, observed Hillegren, due to prosecutor Ny’s stubborn insistence that Assange must return to Sweden in order to be interviewed. She finally relented after the supreme court signalled that it was prepared to revoke the warrant for Assange’s arrest if the impasse continued.

In November 2016 an interview was finally conducted in the London embassy — in Spanish, according to the terms of a bilateral agreement between Ecuador and Sweden. “It then took six months to translate the interview, which is fully in line with the passivity that has characterized this investigation,” observed Hillegren.

“At the press conference on May 19<sup>th</sup> [concerning the closing of the investigation] Ny tried her hardest to make it look as though she had done her best without succeeding in arriving at a decision [to issue formal charges]. That is not true, but there is a great risk that she managed to convince some people on that point by means of some statements that were both misleading and distasteful.”

Several observations were therefore called for, wrote Hillegren.

### **Diverting attention to avoid the truth**

At the press conference, prosecutor Ny explained the decision to shut down the investigation because she had concluded that it would not be possible to turn Assange over to Sweden within the foreseeable future, which was a precondition for prosecuting him. “She should have realized that in August 2012 at the latest”, noted Hillegren, “after Assange had fled to the Ecuadorian embassy and been granted asylum”.

Prosecutor Ny also stated that it had not been possible to formally notify Assange of the crime(s) of which he was suspected, and that she could not count on getting Ecuador’s permission to do so. “That sounds exceedingly strange. But even if accepted as true, it is reasonable to expect that she should have been aware of that complication at a much earlier stage.

“With her choice of explanation for the decision,” wrote Hillegren, “the prosecutor implies that Assange is guilty of some crime(s) and that practical considerations are the only obstacles to formal charges. That impression is strengthened by her statement that, should Assange ever return to Sweden, he risks being arrested and the investigation would be resumed.”

It would have been much less distasteful, reasoned Hillegren, if she had stated that there was no evidence of crime, as most experienced observers would probably agree. That would have made it clear that Assange should be regarded as innocent — as anyone who has not been convicted should be.

According to Hillegren, it is crystal clear that the Assange investigation should have been dismissed immediately. However: “What would have happened if the prosecutor had suddenly and unexpectedly been struck by passion for the truth and

explained with complete honesty how the investigation was conducted and why, in the end, she had discontinued it? Well, that would have meant a complete self-unmasking and declaration of incompetence.”

The press conference appears to have been nothing more than an attempt by prosecutor Ny to divert attention in order to hide her shortcomings. “Unfortunately, I believe that she has succeeded to some extent,” concludes Hillegren. “She has managed to avoid answering too many questions.....

“It is remarkable that such a high-ranking prosecutor could have handled an investigation in this manner, and equally remarkable that the prosecutor-general allowed it to happen without intervening.

“This investigation has not only been devastating for the Swedish Prosecution Authority. It has also contributed to the spread of a negative impression of Swedish justice around the world.”<sup>51</sup>

Although such harsh and open condemnations by Swedish jurists are extremely rare, Rolf Hillegren’s appear to be widely supported within the legal professions. “I am certain that most of those who have informed themselves about the Assange case share my point of view,” he reports, “even if they don’t say it out loud. I have not met anyone who has said I am wrong, and no one has argued against my opinion pieces — not even Marianne Ny.”

## Unlawful confinement

In early 2016, the criticisms expressed by Judge Sundberg-Weitman, attorney Thorsell and retired prosecutor Hillegren were validated by an authoritative human rights organ of the United Nations.

The U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) was established in 1991 to investigate complaints that states had violated their international human rights obligations. Its judgements are based primarily on four international treaties:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners
- European Convention on Human Rights
- UN Declaration on Human Rights.

The rulings of the UNWGAD are regarded as authoritative by prominent international and regional institutions, including the European Court of Human Rights. Among the high-profile cases it has adjudicated are those concerning opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia, *Washington Post* journalist Jason Rezaian in Iran, and former president Mohamed Morsi in Egypt.

Julian Assange submitted a complaint in September 2014 and on 5 February 2016 UNWGAD announced its judgement: “The deprivation of liberty of Mr. Assange is arbitrary and in contravention of articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 7, 9(1), 9(3), 9(4), 10 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

Accordingly, the Working Group called upon the British and Swedish governments “to assess the situation of Mr. Assange, to ensure his safety and physical integrity, to facilitate the exercise of his right to freedom of movement in an expedient manner, and to ensure the full enjoyment of his rights guaranteed by the international norms on detention.

“The Working Group considers that, taking into account all the circumstances of the case, the adequate remedy would be to ensure the right of free movement of Mr. Assange and accord him an enforceable right to compensation.”

In explaining its judgement, the UNWGAD cited the prosecutorial abuses noted above: “There has been a substantial failure to exercise due diligence on the part of the concerned states [Sweden and the UK] with regard to the performance of the criminal administration ... After more than five years of time lapse, [Assange] is still left even before the stage of preliminary investigation with no predictability as to whether and when a formal process of any judicial dealing would commence....

“The working group is convinced that ... the current situation of Mr Assange staying within the confines of the embassy of the Republic of Ecuador in London has become a state of an arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

“The duration of such detention is, *ipso facto*, incompatible with the presumption of innocence. Mr Assange has been denied the right to contest the continued necessity and proportionality of the arrest warrant in light of the length of this detention. It defeats the purpose and efficiency of justice and the interest of the concerned victims to put this matter of investigation to a state of indefinite procrastination.” Etc., etc.<sup>52</sup>

### “Not some passing fancy”

Needless to say, that was not what the British and Swedish governments wanted to hear; they immediately dismissed the UNWGAD judgement as erroneous and not legally binding. However, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has reminded them that, “Human rights law... is binding law, it is not discretionary law. It is not some passing fancy that a state can apply sometimes and not in others”.<sup>53</sup>

That view was affirmed by former British diplomat Craig Murray who observed that, “The UK and Swedish governments both participated fully, and at great expense to their taxpayers, in this UN process which is a mechanism that both recognise. States including Iran, Burma and Russia have released prisoners following determination by this UN panel, which consists not of politicians or diplomats but of some of the world’s most respected lawyers....

“Countries who have ignored rulings by this UN panel are rare. No democracy has ever done so. Recent examples are Egypt and Uzbekistan. The UK is putting itself in pretty company....

“It would be an act of extraordinary dereliction by the UK and Swedish governments to accept the authority of the tribunal, participate fully in the process, and then refuse to accept the outcome.”

But that is precisely what the two governments have done. For Sweden, at least, it is the first and only time it has ever rejected a judgement by the UNWGAD regarding any case involving any country.

The judgement was all the more remarkable for having been made in defiance of heavy pressure from the U.S. and U.K. governments. “I’m absolutely convinced that [the panel] has been put under very strong political pressure”, said Mads Andenas, a distinguished Norwegian jurist who had chaired the UNWGAD during the early stages of its Assange investigation. “This is a courageous decision which is important for the international rule of law. It is a clear — and for people who read it — an obvious, decision. It’s an outcome of a judicial process in which Sweden and the UK have taken part....

“If this finding had been made against any other country... then these states [Sweden and UK] would have made it clear that the [offending] country should comply with the ruling of the Working Group.... For the international human rights system to function, states must abide by the rulings. There’s no other way to deal with it,” asserted Mads Andenas.

For Ecuador’s foreign minister, Ricardo Patiño, the situation was equally clear: “We’ve said it from the beginning, but now we’re not the only ones. This is obvious political persecution. That has been absolutely demonstrated.... What more do [Sweden and the U.K.] want to be accused of before they start to rectify their error?”<sup>54</sup>

### “Changes nothing”

The answer to Foreign Minister Patiño’s question is that neither country has indicated any willingness to rectify its error or even acknowledge it. The UNWGAD ruling “changes nothing”, declared the U.K. government and has acted accordingly.

The U.N. Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order emphatically disagrees. As the first anniversary of the UNWGAD’s announcement of its decision approached, Alfred de Zayas called for “this abnormal and inhuman situation to end” and emphasized that, “An *à la carte* approach to human rights erodes the credibility of the entire system. It is important that countries that regularly engage in naming and shaming of other countries accept United Nations rulings when they themselves are implicated. It is a matter of intellectual honesty.”<sup>55</sup>

But neither intellectual honesty nor concern for human rights has ever characterized the treatment of Julian Assange by the U.K. and Swedish governments. In that respect, the UNWGAD judgement has indeed “changed nothing”.

In Sweden, now that the persecution of Julian Assange has been left entirely to the British, there is little discernible interest in dealing with the troubling implications of the scandal — despite the withering and apparently widespread disapproval among jurists noted above.

There have, of course, been some calls for an appropriate response, including an official inquiry into the evident prosecutorial misconduct. However, no such response has been initiated and none seems likely, given that so many of the responsible and complicit parties influence the public agenda.

That is reflected in the seemingly willful failure of responsible officials to take appropriate measures against prosecutor Ny’s malfeasance, as the following examples illustrate:

- As head of the national prosecution authority, Prosecutor-General Anders Perklev not only neglected his duty to intervene when the malfeasance of Marianne Ny had become plainly apparent, he has strongly supported it.<sup>56</sup>
- Citing possible violations of both the Swedish Instrument of Government and the European Convention on Human Rights, Judge Brita Sundberg-Weitman in 2014 formally petitioned the Justice Ombudsman to review the prosecution’s passivity in conducting its investigation of Julian Assange. Ombudsman Cecilia Renfors’ response: “You have requested a review of the Prosecution Authority. Your request does not call for any measure to be taken or any statement by me. The matter is closed.” It was a shamefully inadequate reply and evidently intended as a rebuke to the retired judge and professor of law.<sup>57</sup>

- Eva Joly, an eminent Norwegian-French jurist and member of the European Parliament, visited Sweden in March 2014 to discuss her proposals for a resolution of the Assange case. She sought meetings with Minister of Justice Beatrice Ask, Prosecutor-General Anders Perklev and prosecutor Marianne Ny, all of whom declined. “That is very unusual,” noted Eva Joly. “In fact, I cannot recall any similar occasion. This is clearly a difficult question which Swedish officials are very reluctant to discuss. That is unfortunate, because the case involves important issues of legal and human rights that concern everyone, not only Julian Assange.”<sup>58</sup>

These and other derelictions of duty have been allowed to pass without any negative consequence for the responsible officials. That may be the way of the world in most of the world; but the abuse and misuse of power has not been prevalent in Sweden, or at least not thought to be.

### **Indefinite injustice**

Now in retrospect, it is sadly ironic that Julian Assange’s visit to Sweden in 2010 was due mainly to its reputation for nurturing and protecting human rights. That reputation was well-deserved, at least in comparison with most other countries, and the basic values it reflected were deeply rooted in the population.

The question thus becomes: What has happened to Swedish society which has made it possible for something like the prolonged mistreatment of Julian Assange to occur?

Part of the answer is, of course, that things were never perfect in the past, either. Although the Assange affair is among the worst, it is not the first judicial scandal to occur in Sweden. An important enabling factor in the Assange case has been cited by attorney Svante Thorsell — the absence of a limit on the length of time that a criminal suspect can be held in detention (see p. 19). He notes that, “Of the nearly 10,000 individuals who were jailed [during 2014], 21 were deprived of liberty for over 361 days. One suspected drug smuggler was released after three-and-a-half years in jail.

“It does not require a fertile imagination to understand what it is like to be kept 23 hours a day for months, perhaps years, in a room no larger than a freight elevator. That is a method used by primitive states ‘in order to break them’,” observes attorney Thorsell.<sup>60</sup>

Whether or not it was Marianne Ny’s intention to “break” Julian Assange, the freedom to impose indefinite detention made it legally possible for her to maintain a warrant for his arrest for over six years while she twiddled her prosecutorial thumbs.

It is not the first time that indefinite detention has been abused, and it has been repeatedly condemned by Swedish legal experts and international human rights authorities. But nothing is ever done about it, and it thus remains available as a blunt legal instrument for abuse by unscrupulous prosecutors.

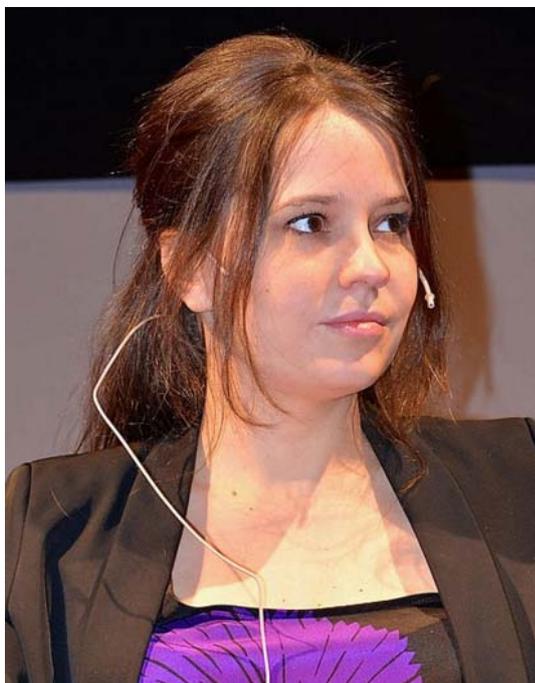
That is something of an anomaly in the context of Swedish politics. One likely explanation is that relatively few people are jailed, and even fewer for lengthy periods. Their numbers do not provide much of a basis for political pressure, even if their friends and relatives are counted. Of course, it is easier to disregard human rights if you give injured party a bad name, as politicians and journalists have done to Julian Assange.

## Angry young women

As Judge Brita Sundberg-Weitman has indicated in her testimony to a British court, feminist thought now plays a significant role in Swedish politics and judicial processes. Prosecutor Ny's remorseless pursuit of Julian Assange seems to have derived much or all of its motivation from her particular brand of feminism, by which "she regards the prosecution of men, even without sufficient evidence, as in the public interest" (see p. 19).

Similar thinking has given rise to the peculiar Swedish institution of "minor rape" — which is the alleged crime for which Assange was inactively investigated, and which is not rape anywhere in the world except Sweden.<sup>59</sup>

Prosecutor Ny's style of thought and behaviour has resonated with the often angry young women who increasingly dominate the definition and public discussion of feminist issues in Sweden. Among them are the "culture" editors of the tabloids *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet* (the largest-circulation dailies), a prominent columnist with *Dagens Nyheter* (the leading broadsheet) and other well-placed journalists. Some of them are friends or associates of Anna Ardin, the alleged victim of Julian Assange who (among other things) submitted falsified evidence to incriminate him — a serious crime for which she has never been investigated.<sup>60</sup>



Karin Olsson (Wikimedia Commons)

*Expressen* is the rag that initiated the largely successful worldwide media campaign to stigmatize Assange as a rapist. Its "culture" editor, Karin Olsson, has been commissioned by *The Guardian* to supply articles for the English-reading world with headlines like "Julian Assange: from hero to zero" and "After this, Julian Assange has very few friends left in Sweden". The latter is a blatant falsehood which also warns *Guardian* readers about "Ecuador's megalomaniac president [Correa]". And so on, and so on....

A person of the female gender who is not pleased with these and related developments is Helene Bergman, a prominent journalist and leading feminist in the ancient past, i.e. before year 2000.

has written. "[It] provides an excellent example of how some journalists ignore the ethical rules which govern Swedish journalism.

"From having been the male hero of journalism, Assange must now be brought down by all means possible in the name of Swedish feminism.... I don't believe that I have ever [before] read so much hate from journalists," observes this feminist of an older and less belligerent school.

"A media storm is a very powerful force," notes Helene Bergman, who feels that Swedish media bear a large measure of responsibility for Assange's confinement in the Ecuadorian embassy. "Journalists failed to check facts, and they have not behaved ethically by treating Assange as innocent until proven guilty.

“It can thus be said that there exists a state of both judicial and media degradation in Sweden.”<sup>61</sup>

There are honourable exceptions, of course, and the dishonourable herd consists not only of young women. Nor are all female journalists on the same malignant wave length as Karin Olsson and her ilk.

In general, however, Marianne Ny has abundant reason to be pleased with Sweden’s mainstream media. For they have “largely ignored the mounting evidence tending to discredit both the accusations against Mr. Assange and the behaviour of the Swedish prosecutor.”

Dissenting voices have been treated accordingly. “There have been a number of outraged media reactions to what has been portrayed as a vile and dishonest attack on the honour and reputation of Sweden by Mr. Assange’s attorneys and friendly witnesses.

“Among the latter have been some highly qualified Swedish experts whose testimony has presented an impediment to indignant outrage. That problem has been dealt with by dismissive and disparaging commentary, and even with the use of unflattering photographs as in the following example.

“The photo on the left was used by *Aftonbladet*... with the fairly obvious intent to portray retired judge Brita Sundberg-Weitman and her testimony in a negative light. The photo on the right, readily available from Google Images, is a far more accurate representation of her appearance — but would not have served the obvious editorial purpose.”<sup>62</sup>



*Brita Sundberg-Weitman  
Aftonbladet 2011-02-08*



*Brita Sundberg-Weitman  
Google Images*

As Helene Bergman has indicated, certain strains of Swedish feminism comprise an important factor in the persecution of Julian Assange. They include Marianne Ny's crusade against "perpetrators" — a category which, to her way of thinking, includes all men suspected or accused of assaulting women — and the passionate desire of angry young women like Karin Olsson to believe men guilty and punish them "by all means possible".

Prosecutor Ny's decision in May 2017 to discontinue her malicious non-investigation of Assange provided an opportunity for such interests and the media in general to reflect upon their shameful conduct in the Assange case. But guess what: That has not happened.

Instead, they have blithely moved on to other matters, although one of them is related. In recent months, public discussion throughout the Western world has been largely concerned with the "#metoo movement", a long overdue reaction against sexual abuse in virtually all areas of life.<sup>63</sup>

As usual when long-suppressed emotions are finally released, their expression is not always rational or pleasant. The #metoo movement has already reaped some innocent victims and there are no doubt more to come — although it does not appear that any of them are destined to spend years cooped up in a Latin American embassy.

In any event, the problem of sexual abuse is undeniably genuine, widespread and deserving of the attention it has been getting. In Sweden, some of the men who have been publicly denounced, lost their jobs, etc. (not necessarily on the basis of any evidence) are journalists who have eagerly participated in the media onslaught against Julian Assange — a sort of ironic justice, perhaps.

### **Corrupting influence**

While it is clear that the betrayal of Sweden's human rights tradition in the Assange case can be partly explained by the harmful effects of feminism in some of its forms, it is equally clear that other factors are involved. The most powerful of them is the growing and corrupting influence of the United States on Swedish society, a process that has been orchestrated largely out of sight by political leaders out of step with the citizens they are supposed to serve, and obscured by mainstream media which have endeavoured to keep the people (and perhaps themselves) in ignorance and misunderstanding.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the 40 years following World War II, Sweden was a neutral and comparatively independent country whose politics were dominated by the Social Democratic Party. The SDP was in turn dominated by its progressive, peace wing whose leading figures included highly competent women such as Inga Thorson, Alva Myrdal and Maj Britt Théorin.

The influence of that political tendency culminated during 1969 – 1986, when Olof Palme was the party leader. During 1969 – 1976 and 1982 – 1986 he was also prime minister and his policies greatly offended the United States, especially his forceful condemnation of U.S. aggression against Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua and other countries.

That problem was solved for and possibly by the United States when Palme was assassinated in Stockholm on 28 February 1986. The murder remains unsolved, due to what appears to be deliberate sabotage of the investigation by the police in charge of it.<sup>64</sup>

## From Vietnam to Iraq

### *Anna Lindh and the Transformation of the SDP*

Inspired by Olof Palme, Anna Lindh had joined the [Social Democratic Party's youth organization] at age 12 and was soon elected to lead her local chapter. One of her first initiatives was an exhibition about the Vietnam War, to which Palme was an eloquent and influential opponent....

Among the many consequences of [the *de facto* alliance]: U.S. troops are now stationed on Swedish soil, most likely for many years to come, and Swedish troops have participated in U.S. wars of aggression in the Balkans, Libya and Afghanistan. All signs point to a steady increase of such collaboration....

With few exceptions and occasional flashes of her former self, Anna Lindh adapted her public views to the new party doctrine — so much so that as foreign minister [from 1998 - 2003] she parroted U.S. propaganda to justify the superpower's aggression against Iraq, to cite one example.

That prompted a response from the board of the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research.: "The speech by Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh for United Nations Day was to a great extent about Iraq.... On UN Day, one would have expected her to follow Sweden's traditional foreign policy orientation and analyse the actual threat to international peace and security... to discuss creative measures to preserve peace in the region and hinder the United States' mobilisation for an attack, which is already at a very advanced stage.

"But instead of giving the inspectors a chance, the Minister chose to support the war option.... Many in the world expect totally different, more independent, genuine conflict management and peace-promoting measures from Sweden...."

For these and other reasons, Anna Lindh's fate may be especially relevant for understanding the transformation of Sweden during the three decades since Olof Palme was eliminated. One obvious question is: How could such a gifted and evidently decent human being like Anna Lindh start out as a disciple of Palme and end up collaborating with [bellicose prime minister] Göran Persson, and consequently with blood-soaked war criminals like Colin Powell and George W. Bush?

It is a particularly cruel irony that, as a young officer, the future General Powell helped to cover up the My Lai massacre — the atrocity which typified the Vietnam War that young Anna had so passionately opposed.<sup>65</sup>

After Palme's elimination, control of the SDP was taken over by reactionary elements that have adopted neoliberal socio-economic policies, and discarded neutrality for a *de facto* military alliance with the United States via NATO. The latter has been a necessarily furtive process, given that a large majority of SDP members and a large plurality of all voters have been stubbornly opposed to NATO membership — despite continual efforts by Swedish mainstream media to change their minds.

That is of little consequence, however. What the people want and think is demonstrably of no concern to Sweden's political elite, except as a problem to be solved or ignored. For the most part it has been ignored, as Sweden has been surreptitiously



*Jenny Ringström/Försvarsmakten*

*Vietnam or Sweden? In a scene reminiscent of the Vietnam War, helicopters hover over the Swedish island of Gotland in the summer of 2017, during a military exercise in which Swedish troops joined with comrades from the United States and other NATO countries to counteract “the threat from Russia”. Such exercises have become commonplace and reflect Sweden’s informal, albeit formally unacknowledged membership in USA/NATO.*

converted from a peace-loving to a war-making nation in a deceitful process that has been called a “tyranny of small steps”. And all the while, those responsible issue reassurances that it is not happening.

Those reassurances have thus far sufficed to prevent any popular revolt against the abandonment of neutrality and the corollary alliance with USA/NATO. To a large extent, that passivity can be explained by the neglect, obfuscation and Russophobic scaremongering of the mainstream media.

This, in brief, is the context within which Julian Assange’s 2010 visit to Sweden took place. There is little doubt that the government’s mistreatment of him is a consequence of its subjugation to the United States.

— Al Burke

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