



March 2023

THE STORY OF JULIAN ASSANGE

Julian Assange is an Australian citizen, activist, co-founder of WikiLeaks, *journalist and publisher*, currently detained in the extremely harsh maximum security prison of Belmarsh (London), awaiting the pronouncement of the British High Court on an appeal filed by his lawyers against the extradition request made by the United States, which wants to try him and sentence him up to a maximum of 175 years in prison... simply for having done his job as a publisher.

Julian Assange has been an activist from a very young age. His is a gifted, restless mind – that of a genius with tireless curiosity. While still a youth, he was charged for hacking, convicted but then released on good behavior, after paying a fine and especially after accepting to put his talents as a computer wizard at the disposition of investigators trying to break up a pedophile gang.

He became famous when, starting in 2006, he began promoting, together with others, the website they called WikiLeaks, of which he enjoyed the title of editor in chief.

As an organization of volunteers, WikiLeaks is dedicated to disseminating documents, even secret ones,



JULIAN PAUL ASSANGE

Born Julian Paul Hawkins on July 3, 1971
in Townsville, Australia.

furnished by *whistleblowers* (people who decide freely to violate the rules of confidentiality with their employer because they feel that revealing certain documents is in the *public interest*). Wikileaks, which protects their anonymity, is in turn responsible for ascertaining that the documents are genuine and reliable, and for redacting the files

Redaction serves, first, to eliminate any possibility of tracing the documents back to the persons who passed them on (*the whistleblowers*); secondly and above all, documents are redacted so as not to jeopardize lives or genuine national security interests. There are cases in which the identity of whistleblowers has been discovered but this has happened as a result of human failures, for example if a whistleblower recklessly confides with strangers who then betray and expose him or her.

Wikileaks is a platform that collects information by means of encryption, an innovative method which has been subsequently adopted by other major news outlets to protect their sources – news outlets which had never realized how necessary *encryption* is. Over the years WikiLeaks has published classified documents furnished by whistleblowers from around the world, documents regarding the bombings in Yemen, corruption in the Arab world, graft in Kenya, the suppression of the Tibetan uprising in China in 2008, the oil scandal in Peru, the purges by the Erdoğan government in 2016, the Russian government's ties with the local mafia and, of course, the war crimes of the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere

Assange revealed the *skeletons in closets* all over the world, sparing none. This was by no means scandal sheet journalism or gossip: the documents published have always been of genuine public interest. If they had been deliberately kept secret it was simply because they were embarrassing. Governments and entities do not like to be revealed for what they are before public opinion.

WikiLeaks reached international attention in **2010**, when Assange revealed a series of reports provided by *Chelsea Manning*, a young intelligence analyst stationed in Iraq.

These included the now famous *Collateral Murder* video, the Afghanistan war diaries, the Iraq war logs, and CableGate,

the diplomatic cables that showed to the world the real face of so-called peacekeeping and counter-terrorism, as well as the real numbers of innocent civilians killed in the process.

Collateral Murder was the last straw: the US government immediately launched a ruthless smear campaign against Assange and Wikileaks, defaming the former and blocking fundraising for the latter, effectively hamstringing all activities.

By "sheer coincidence," on November 18, 2010, a court in *Stockholm* issued a warrant for the arrest in absentia of Julian Assange, who was living in London, on charges of "minor rape" (the term used in Swedish law for failure to use a condom during coitus), sexual harassment and coercion. Assange denied the charges, considering them merely a pretext to get him to return to Sweden where he could be easily *extradited to the United States* to stand trial for the publication of secret US documents. (Sweden had, in the past, facilitated extraditions to the United States even if illegal, e.g. extraordinary renditions.)



An iconic scene from the *Collateral Murder* video

Assange saw the trap and so, rather than returning to Sweden, he asked to be interrogated by Swedish investigators in London or by video conference, two possibilities provided by Swedish law. The investigators were about to leave for London to question Assange when they were blocked by British authorities who told them to insist on getting Assange to come to Sweden.

(without a well-founded reason, since that since always the investigators take a flight and go everywhere to interrogate suspects), a country that had, in the past, facilitated extraditions to the United States even if illegal (extraordinary renditions).

Then, on **November 2, 2011**, the High Court in London approved a request by the Swedish Prosecutor to compel Assange to go to Sweden to be heard. To avoid the trap, on **June 19, 2012**, Assange managed to enter the Embassy of Ecuador in London and ask for political asylum. Ecuadorian President **Rafael Correa** granted it on **August 16, 2012**.

Assange was to spend the next 7 years and more in the cramped rooms of the Ecuadorean embassy, in a living space of a few square meters and without ever seeing the light of day. His health thus deteriorated rapidly. He asked to be allowed to go for treatment but was denied that possibility by the British authorities, or rather, he was told he could leave the Embassy for treatment but if he did, he would be arrested immediately.

Subsequently it was learned that during these 7 years Assange was constantly spied upon -- illegally -- by the Spanish company **UC Global**, which had been hired to protect the Embassy, not to spy on people there. Yet not only Assange but anyone who came to visit him, including his lawyers, were filmed and their conversations recorded. Yahoo News recently reported that the CIA even had plans to kill Julian, by poisoning him, or at least kidnap him from the Embassy, under orders directly from none other than **Mike Pompeo**, former CIA director turned **Secretary of State under President Trump**.

In 2017, a new president came to power in Ecuador: betraying the mandate of the voters, he radically changed policy and revoked Assange's political asylum. On **April 11, 2019**, the **British police raided the Ecuadorean Embassy** and dragged Assange off to Belmarsh maximum security prison in London, where he is detained to this day.

Shortly afterwards came the request for **extradition by the US Department of Justice** on charges of conspiracy and espionage (17 counts for alleged violations of the **Espionage act**) and for computer fraud and abuse (one count under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act). Since that date Assange has been holed up in a maximum security penitentiary together with extremely dangerous inmates, a living hell where abuses and suicides frequently occur.

Julian passes *22 hours per day* in total isolation, in extremely severe (even life-threatening) physical and psychological conditions. In 2021 his family even had to put up a fight to protect him from the intense cold. Numerous companions of his have committed suicide.

Yannis Varoufakis managed to visit Assange and found him in a seriously altered state (he was constantly blinking and shifting his eyes, a trait of someone having been subjected to psychological torture). Subsequently Nils Melzer, then the UN Special Envoy against torture and inhumane treatment, visited Julian in prison, bringing with him medical personnel; he ascertained that Julian did indeed show "the typical signs of prolonged exposure to psychological torture" with the concrete likelihood that his current condition would deteriorate dramatically.



***Assange with Stefania Maurizi
being spied on in the Ecuadorian
Embassy in London***

It couldn't be otherwise, given that Julian is detained in a single cell measuring 2m by 3m and 2.3 meters high. He is entitled to spend only 15 British pounds per week (roughly 17 euros or 18 dollars), divided among phone calls, pens and stationery, and personal needs.

He is entitled from *30 to 60 minutes in an outside courtyard per day*, depending on weather conditions. He can see family members every two weeks, but visits can be revoked, even at the last minute, as has already happened several times. Moreover, whenever his family visits him, even his tiny children are searched.



HMP Belmarsh - London

Meanwhile, the charge of "minor rape" that had been brought against him in *Sweden* was **dropped** under the statute of limitations; the young women who were allegedly subjected to violence now say that, not only were they consenting, but that, in reality, they had gone to the police only to force Julian to take an HIV test. Because of the statute of limitations, Assange has lost the opportunity to defend himself in the courtroom from the infamy that the orchestrated slander campaign has inflicted on him to make him lose the sympathy and support of the public. It is now clear to all that the entire Swedish case was just an excuse to put Julian on the defensive and to give the **US** the **necessary time to elaborate a bullet-proof** indictment guaranteed to convict him and to imprison him practically for life.

This marks the beginning of one of the toughest legal battles ever and it is still going on.

On **January 4, 2021**, judge **Vanessa Baraitser** denied extraditing **Assange** to the United States because of a concrete danger of suicide, due not to fearsome threats but to his seriously deteriorated psychic condition. However, two days later she refused to grant Julian his freedom, justifying her decision by a presumed danger of flight. The United States appealed against Judge Baraitser's decision and, in **December 2021**, the Court of Appeals overturned her ruling by accepting the reassurances of the US authorities who pledged (on paper) to avoid inflicting on Julian imprisonment in **solitary confinement** in a maximum security prison. What subservience on the part of the United Kingdom! How could British authorities give credit to a country that has habitually ignored its commitments (v. the case of David Mendoza, arrested in Spain and freed after a long battle legal battle)?

Assange's lawyers took the case to the Court of Appeals but, in **March 2022**, the British Supreme Court rejected the appeal, deeming insubstantial in point of law the issues raised by the defense lawyers in demanding a retrial. On **June 17, 2022**, the then **British Home Secretary, Priti Patel**, signed the official approval of the extradition of Julian Assange to the US.

Assange's defense team appealed to the British High Court and then shortly afterwards also to the **European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)** – although it was technically too early since the last appeal had not been heard. We are still awaiting the responses of both bodies.

The time frame is very long because the appeal to the High Court, addressing mostly procedural issues, consists of hundreds of pages. As regards to the ECHR, the latter usually takes as long as **7 years for similar cases**. Without going into the details of the various irregularities committed against Julian during the judicial process, it is worth bearing in mind in mind that, should Assange be extradited, it would be impossible for him to defend himself in a US court because the **Espionage Act** does not allow defense by invoking the public interest. But this is precisely what Wikileaks is all about and the principal cornerstone of journalism in in general.

There is a general suspicion, in any case, that the whole drawn-out judicial process is actually an attempt to wear Assange down so that he takes his own life, whether because of his now deteriorating health and physical conditions or because of his delicate mental condition. Added to this is the truly violent situation in a prison that houses criminals who have committed the most heinous crimes.

The truth is, however you look at it, that the Powers that be are trying *to silence forever a voice* they find irritating, an independent and disinterested voice ready to reveal their crimes and the dirty secrets they want to hide from public scrutiny. A voice able to debunk their deceptive narratives, so far from the truth, used to mask their real intentions. Yes, these forces are trying to gag not only a danger to their systematic warmongering and criminal behavior, but, because Assange has aroused the consciences of millions of people, they are trying to gag and intimidate the press worldwide. *Everyone's freedom is in danger. We must not allow this to happen.* Only the truth will set us free. For this we have a duty to fight for the liberation of Julian Assange, everywhere and without respite.



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