

The Martyrdom of St. Julian of Wikileaks

By Dmitry Orlov, 29 April 2019

News of the arrest and imprisonment of Julian Assange has probably reached you by now, but, just in case, here is a recap. Julian Assange is an Australian journalist; as such, he is a towering giant among a tiny cluster of midgets. Google “great Australian journalists” and you get him and a bunch of people nobody has ever heard of, many of them already dead.

He is a towering figure outside of Australia as well. While other Western journalists run around trying to please their owners, sell advertising space, or struggle to avoid getting banned by the all-seeing eye of social media corporations, Assange has been both principled and fearless. Through his media outlet Wikileaks he has laid bare the dirty secrets of the US State Department and the war crimes of the Pentagon, corporate malfeasance and political corruption, hanging out for all to see the dirty laundry of many powerful and influential people. This made him a cause célèbre: Time Magazine pronounced him Man of the Year and he received human rights awards, standing in the same pantheon as Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama. But such are the vicissitudes of fortune that now he is being martyred—a sufferer for the truth, unjustly accused and persecuted by a doomed race of inveterate liars.

This was inevitable. In the process of publishing evidence of dirty secrets and war crimes he made plenty of powerful, influential enemies, and they eventually scared up some false evidence to use against him. In 2012, faced with the unenviable fate of being extradited from the UK to Sweden, there to be humiliated before a Swedish kangaroo court, Assange opted to enter the Ecuadoran embassy in London, where he spent the next seven years living in a small room. It was, in essence, a form of solitary confinement, which is commonly considered to be a form of torture.

It’s hard to tell whether seeking refuge in the Ecuadoran embassy was a good decision or a bad one to start with, but it turned into an increasingly bad decision over time. On the one hand, the Swedish case against him eventually went away due to the extreme ridiculousness of the charges. On the other hand, something happened in the course of the 2016 presidential election in the US that placed him directly in the crosshairs of some exceptionally evil people.

Into his lap fell a mother lode of evidence that the Democratic National Committee, charged with providing for honest and transparent primary elections, had instead conspired to steal the election from the popular firebrand Bernie Sanders, who spoke before packed stadiums, and to give it to Hillary Clinton, an evil-tempered, screechy, sickly crone who on most days could barely fill a school auditorium without bribing people. To me, choosing between Sanders, Clinton and Trump is like choosing the color of flower petals to gently blow across the surface of a cesspool, but it appears that for some naïve and idealistic people Assange’s truth bomb was something of a revelation: “What? Hillary evil? Noooo!”

Assange published this information, and in so doing he stepped directly into the snake-pit called the Clinton Foundation—a vast, global grift, bribery and money-laundering scheme that, among other things, provided weapons contracts in exchange for lavish bribes from foreign officials. Its tentacles reached into all of the major US federal agencies, which had been stocked

with Clinton partisans during Bill Clinton's two terms as president. When Hillary Clinton then lost the election to Donald Trump—among other things, because angry Sanders supporters wouldn't vote for her—a sort of slow-motion, bureaucratic civil war erupted within the Washington establishment, and Assange got stuck in the crossfire.

The missiles flying in this war have been carrying two types of payloads: truth-based and lie-based. Truth is what Assange had; it is a powerful weapon, but it has two major disadvantages. First, it is scarce and difficult to procure. Second, for it to be effective, people have to actually prefer it to being lied to. If the truth is that you are powerless and easily ignored but compelled by sheer force of propaganda to periodically take part in a humiliating farce called “national elections,” then, for obvious psychological reasons, untruth becomes your friend. The disadvantage of untruth is that when wielded by known liars it becomes no more effective than flinging feces. This disadvantage can be turned into an advantage by making enough people sufficiently mad to cause them to want to start flinging feces too.

Over the intervening years, a concerted effort, organized at the highest levels, has been made to increase the disadvantages of truth and to decrease the disadvantages of untruth. Strenuous efforts to prosecute leakers, hackers and whistleblowers have greatly reduced the public availability of truth, giving truth-seekers like Assange significantly less material to work with. Equally strenuous efforts by US mass media outlets to ignore Clinton's malfeasance while endlessly smearing Trump have conditioned numerous politically polarized brains to prefer lies over the truth if the lies help their lost cause while the truth hurts it.

The truth that an incensed and disgusted Democratic party insider with physical access to the server copied incriminating evidence to a thumb drive and gave it to Wikileaks is damaging. The lie that “Russian hackers” managed to hack into this server, download the evidence over an internet connection and then upload it to Wikileaks in order to get Trump elected is helpful. A few heaping handfuls of Russophobic hysteria later, and the popular narrative “Clinton is a crook; that's why she lost” is replaced with the popular narrative “Trump is a Russian stooge; that's why he won.” Meanwhile, the feces-flinging machine has been running non-stop, producing an endless stream of fake news about Russian meddling, hacking, poisoning and other, yet-to-be-invented deeds yet more mean.

St. Julian of Antioch (lower left). The equivalent of the NSA of that day stuffed him into a sack filled with sand, vipers and scorpions and dumped in the sea because he refused to recant. The angels wept.

Speaking of mean, this may be a particularly mean thing for me to say, because it may cause some politically polarized brains to explode, but I'll say it anyway: Narrative Isn't Everything. The world is split into people who thrive on clicks, views, likes, shares, reposts, ratings and other such nonsense; for them, narrative does seem like everything. After all, people like being told stories, and a lot of the simpler people don't see the point of drawing a sharp line between fiction and nonfiction. For instance, whether the Bible is fiction or non is a question of belief, not fact (facts exist independently of whether anyone believes them). On the other hand, there are people who are tasked with making things work, and for them narrative is dangerous: it is at best a garden path that leads them away from considering important certain facts and toward

giving undue emphasis to others, while a false narrative leads them away from facts altogether.

Just because a certain narrative has become more popular than another doesn't mean that it has won; it may just mean that the sad, insane people whose minds it has infested have lost. The replacement of the popular narrative "Clinton is a crook; that's why she lost" with the popular narrative "Trump is a Russian stooge; that's why he won" has not changed the underlying reality.

What it did was produce a pocket of stark-raving feces-flinging insanity. Helpful Russian clinicians in white coats are standing by with straitjackets and syringes of lorazepam while the rest of the world watches nervously. All hope that this bout of mass insanity will eventually run its course without requiring major medical intervention. Meanwhile, the denizens of the insane asylum obsess over the color of flower petals to scatter over the cesspool of their national politics in 2020.

But back to Assange: not only has the world changed during his term of solitary confinement in the Ecuadoran embassy, but he has changed too. The superstar who once gave impassioned speeches from the balcony of the embassy to an excited crowd could barely be recognized in the unkempt old man who was unceremoniously dragged out of the embassy and into a police van. It was a sad sight, and many people are very upset at the prospect that the Brits will now hand him over to the Americans who will torture him to death. But what if they don't? And if they don't, would another seven years locked up at the embassy have been any better?

Perhaps the worst part of it for Assange is that he is no longer needed. Wikileaks doesn't need him any more, since Kristinn Hrafnsson has taken over as chief editor. He is no longer needed by Ecuador, which in 2012 was ruled by Rafael Correa, an architect of "new socialism" and an ally of Hugo Chavez of Venezuela; but now Correa has been replaced and is facing persecution while Chavez is dead. While he was at the embassy, Ecuadoran authorities systematically limited Assange's freedom of action, eventually cutting off his internet access and forbidding visitors, making it impossible for him to work.

He is no longer needed by Trump, whose victory he did so much to assure by letting the world know the truth about two-faced Hillary. Trump, who once said "I love Wikileaks" now sees Assange as a toxic asset: his opponents will no doubt try to invent evidence of collusion between Assange and him and, failing that, hallucinate up some "obstruction of justice." From Trump's point of view, it would be best if Assange were quietly disappeared. And although Trump's opponents may be unable to resist the temptation to persecute Assange, for them he may turn out to be something of a poisoned chalice, because enough people remember Assange as the fearless journalist who let the world see grave misdeeds at the US State Department and war crimes at the Pentagon, and may take Assange's side.

He is no longer even needed by Sweden: the rape allegations against him were dropped two years ago. And it is rather questionable whether the British government has legitimate grounds to hold him: he jumped bail by entering the Ecuadoran embassy, but the arrest, and the bail, had been granted in connection with the Swedish extradition request, which is no longer valid, making the entire matter null and void. As for the question of his extradition to the US, the Ecuadoran government swore up and down that it revoked his asylum based on a written

guarantee by the Brits not to extradite him to the US. This is probably what Trump wants: to make a political show of furthering the cause of justice while doing nothing.

From this point of view Assange's liberation from the Ecuadoran embassy and imprisonment in a British jail on charges of violating bail for an arrest grounds for which have since been dismissed starts to look like a major success. He is once again in the public eye, with numerous supporters throughout the world. If all goes well, he will be released and re-establish himself as a media personality of great stature. And if everything goes badly and the Americans do get their hands on him and torture him to death, he will die as a martyr and live in public memory forever.

I don't know whether Assange has been baptized, but a proper choice of saint for him would be St. Julian of Antioch, who was martyred during Emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians between 303 and 313 AD. Julian was stuffed into a sack filled with sand, vipers and scorpions and dumped in the sea. Diocletian's initiative was a failure: the son of one of his lieutenants, Constantine, not only canceled the persecution of Christians but made Christianity into Roman Empire's state religion. He then moved its capital to New Rome (Constantinople), abandoning Old Rome to languish in the Dark Ages while his New Rome went on for a thousand glorious years.

Should Julian Assange end up martyred by the Americans, we can expect a vaguely similar result: future generations of Americans will say: "There once was a great journalist by the name of Julian. He died as a martyr for the truth. It was a long time ago, and we don't know what's been happening to us since then, because all we have been hearing ever since have been nothing but lies..."