

## Assange, Accountability and Justice



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**A**fter seven years in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has been finally arrested (11/04/19).

Assange hit international headlines for having taken sensitive US intelligence from former American Army transgender whistle-blower, Bradley, now Chelsea Manning, and having published it. Manning was arrested by US authorities in 2010 and charged under the country's Espionage Act. She is was given a 35-year sentence, but President Obama commuted this to 7 years imprisonment.

In 2010 Assange was served an arrest warrant by the Swedish government for the alleged sexual assault and rape of two Swedish women. Assange denied the allegations levelled at him. Swedish authorities sought an extradition order to address this matter, however, Assange and his supporters in the UK believed that the Swedish allegations were a ruse designed to get him extradited to the United States to stand trial for espionage. In 2012, Assange's various attempts at challenging the Swedish charges failed and he sought political asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy.

In 2016, Wikileaks again stole the international media spotlight for having released hacked emails of then Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, leading to accusations that Assange cooperated with Russian hackers in order to get Trump elected president.

While this was a very sensationalist accusation to make, what is irrefutable is that Wikileaks released these emails.

Whether this had a positive effect on the Trump campaign will be for historians to decide, but it had an effect on Assange and Wikileaks, both being tarred as politically partisan. Even those who initially thought the Wikileaks mission was a good one, shedding light and accountability on government actions, especially when actions are not necessarily in the national interest, the Clinton email scandal was considered a step too far.

Stories as to why the Ecuadorians decided to give Assange up now are numerous, but the two leading theories are that Assange [spied](#) on Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno and that Assange was an ungrateful guest of the Ecuadorians, letting his [personal hygiene](#) lapse to a point where it was just too difficult to ignore by embassy staff. There are of course stories suggesting that the relationship between embassy staff and Assange was increasingly problematic and that the resident Ambassador had begun talks with [British authorities](#) on Assange's release.

Now that he's out, the US will do what it can to make Assange stand trial for crimes committed against it. The Australian Morrison government has pledged [consular assistance](#) for Assange, but this seems unlikely to prevent him from eventually finding his way to the United States to stand trial for espionage.

As for Trump, whether the direct or indirect beneficiary of Hillary Clinton's reputational hit following on from the Wikileaks email 'dump', he is now preparing for the 2020 US presidential campaign with an outside chance of winning, having been recently exonerated of 'Russian Collusion' by the Mueller Enquiry.

Furthermore, this long, vitriolic saga surrounding Assange and Wikileaks is unlikely to end, now that he is in British custody. But there is a much bigger picture at stake here. And that is that it will be a very long time before anyone, whether justified or not, will leak classified government documents for public consumption. The personal cost that Assange may well still pay for his ‘celebrity status’ as crusader for free speech and freedom of information might be too high. And while ‘a martyr for the cause’, who would now be willing to follow him down this path? Ironically, Assange has done a great disservice to the act of whistleblowing and governments around the world may well be breathing a sigh of relief. What happens to Assange next will define deterrence to future whistleblowing attempts and sadly this will be a blow to keeping governments accountable for their actions.

### **Image Credits**

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