

# WikiLeaks editor denounces mass internet surveillance and US attacks on democratic rights

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WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has stepped up his exposure of the escalating US-led attacks on legal and democratic rights with a series of media appearances over the past few weeks to promote his book *Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet*. Co-authored with Jacob Applebaum, Jeremie Zimmermann and Andy Mueller-Maguhn, the book warns that state authorities and giant corporations are using the Internet to facilitate massive spying operations.

“The Internet,” Assange declares in the introduction, “has led to revolutions across the world but a crackdown is now in full swing. As whole societies move online, mass surveillance programs are being deployed globally. Our civilization has reached a crossroads.”

In line with the Obama administration’s campaign against WikiLeaks, most of the mainstream media has largely ignored the book. Others, such as the American television network CNN, have brushed aside the book’s themes while claiming that Assange’s principled defence of press freedom is hypocritical. CNN journalist Erin Burnett, who hosts the network’s prime time nightly news program—“Erin Burnett: OutFront”—attempted this approach in late November.

CNN producers assured Assange that the program would discuss *Cypherpunks*, but Burnett, who began her career as a financial analyst for Goldman Sachs before moving into television journalism, had no intention of allowing the WikiLeaks founder to participate in any such discussion.

Assange remains holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, after he was granted political asylum by that country, in the wake of a British High Court decision to

extradite him to Sweden on bogus sexual misconduct charges. The Australian citizen rightly fears that if he is sent to Sweden he will be extradited to the US to face frame-up espionage charges. A grand jury has already been convened in that country to indict him, while the American military has branded WikiLeaks and Julian Assange as “the enemy,” placing them on a legal par with Al Qaeda.

After an initial question about the book, CNN anchor Burnett provocatively asked Assange if he felt “any guilt” about the situation facing Bradley Manning, the young US soldier currently facing pretrial hearings for allegedly leaking classified government documents to WikiLeaks.

Assange calmly replied that the brutal treatment being meted out to Manning was aimed at trying to coerce the young man into a confession that would directly implicate WikiLeaks. The case, he observed, was another “reflection of the decay in the rule of law.” Assange pointed out that the UN’s special rapporteur Juan Mendez had described Manning’s treatment as akin to torture.

Burnett attempted to dismiss this response by claiming it was simply an indication of the WikiLeaks founder’s “strong point of view.” In other words, it was just another opinion, rather than a clear statement of fact. “I don’t want to get into detail” about Manning’s treatment, she retorted, and then asked Assange to comment on the legal case and whether a plea deal by Manning could endanger WikiLeaks.

Assange refused to fall for this ploy—stating that it was legally unwise to discuss the specifics of the case, given that the trial was underway—and returned to his book’s warnings about the assault on basic democratic

rights.

What is happening, he continued, was “part of a much wider process... [and one] which all the top national security journalists in the United States are talking about... Dana Priest from the *Washington Post*, in her book *Top Secret America*, likens what’s going on to a metastasising cancer, where we now have five million people in the national security clearance system in the United States, a state within a state...

“This is a worldwide phenomenon,” he continued. “The new game in town is strategic surveillance. It is cheaper now to intercept all communications in and out of a country, store it permanently, than it is to simply go after one particular person.”

Burnett again tried to deflect, asking the WikiLeaks editor to discuss recent reports on his health. He refused, stating that this was “not very important” and referred back to his book and the escalating assault on democratic rights.

Burnett insisted that the WikiLeaks founder talk about press freedom in Ecuador, suggesting that in light of recent reports of Ecuador’s suppression of the press, his stance was hypocritical. Assange again refused to be provoked and explained that he had agreed to the television interview in order to discuss his book, not Ecuador.

“Why will you not talk about Ecuador?” the now agitated Burnett shouted.

Assange made clear that the small South American country played no role in the global internet spying operations and that while he was concerned about the suppression of free speech, which, he said, was “an extremely big problem all over the world”, so was “the collapse in the rule of law.”

In this regard, the WikiLeaks editor reviewed US government attacks on the legal rights of journalists, including the six year incarceration of an Al Jazeera journalist in Guantánamo Bay, and warned that such anti-democratic assaults were a threat to all serious journalists.

“The topic of this book is what is happening to all of us and the threats that all of us face,” he explained. “In the 1930s, certain people saw what was going on and they saw the general trends. I’m telling you there is a general trend. I am an expert and have lived through it. Other experts have lived through different facets of this... This is a state change. This is not a matter of

simply a small change to an individual. It is a sea change in politics. And we are going to have to do something about it. If we don’t do something about it, we all run the risk of losing the democracy that we’ve treasured for so long.”

Unable to answer these remarks, Burnett quickly ended the interview.

While Assange powerfully rebuffed the crude provocations thrown at him by the CNN journalist, the interview once again reveals the intense hostility of the corporate media establishment towards the WikiLeaks web site and its founder. The whistle blowing site has not just revealed the war crimes of US imperialism and its political allies, but exposed the complicity of the mainstream media in these crimes. Well-heeled establishment figures, such as Burnett and others have no interest in genuine journalism. They have become nothing but cyphers for Washington’s slanders and lies. The full “OutFront” interview can be viewed here.



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