

Four years since the arrest of Julian Assange

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December 7 marked four years since WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was arrested in London and detained without charge. December 5 marked 900 days that he has been holed up inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London after being forced to claim political asylum.

Assange remains in this perilous situation despite not having a single charge laid against him. The Swedish authorities seeking his extradition from the UK under bogus allegations of sexual assault recently upheld the arrest warrant against him.

If Assange had not taken shelter in the Ecuadorian embassy, he would most likely now be in prison—the fate of US army whistleblower Chelsea (Bradley) Manning—or even dead.

The attempts to railroad Assange to Sweden are being carried out by the Swedish, UK and US governments. Ultimately, the latter intends Assange to be extradited from Sweden to the United States where a grand jury, empanelled in 2010, remains open to bring as yet unspecified charges against him that may include espionage—a capital crime.

Assange is being hounded because he and WikiLeaks brought to global attention heinous war crimes committed by the US and the main imperialist powers in Iraq and Afghanistan—crimes authorised at the highest level of government. WikiLeaks first came to worldwide prominence when it released the leaked “Collateral Murder” video showing American soldiers shooting from a helicopter and killing defenceless civilians and children in Iraq in July 2007.

In response, the US moved to silence Assange, with the aim of shutting down WikiLeaks. Within days of WikiLeaks’ beginning to publish, in November 2010, 250,000 leaked US diplomatic cables that exposed the predatory role of American foreign policy around the world, Assange was arrested under a European Arrest Warrant (EAW) issued by Sweden.

Assange is the victim of a pernicious and transparent frame-up. He is not named as an accused person on the EAW, which states that he is required in Sweden only for questioning. But the Swedish prosecutors subsequently rejected many requests by Assange for Swedish officials to question him in the UK.

Since June 19, 2012, Assange has been forced to remain inside the Ecuadorian embassy to prevent his being handed over to Sweden by British authorities. Ever since he entered the embassy, it has been the target of a round-the-clock siege by the police at a cost of over £8 million. Assange cannot even enter a hospital, despite deteriorating health.

The UK government denied him safe conduct to Ecuador, which granted him asylum on the grounds that he faces the threat of torture and death if sent to the US. At one point, the British government announced that it did not respect the international principle of diplomatic asylum and threatened to have the embassy stormed.

What has happened in the past four years shows why Assange remains a wanted man.

The imperialist powers have fomented civil wars in Libya and Syria, ending in the overthrow of the government and the barbaric murder of Libya’s deposed head of state, Muammar Gaddafi. The US and Britain have now resumed military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, once again under the guise of fighting “terrorism”.

Earlier this year, the US and Germany engineered a right-wing coup in Ukraine, confronting Russia with an existential threat, as part of long-term plans to expand NATO to Russia’s borders and establish control over the entire Eurasian land mass. The ensuing civil war in Ukraine has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and brought Europe and the world closer to war than at any time since 1945.

One could add to this list: US drone attacks on Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan that have resulted in

thousands of civilian deaths; the dispatch of military “experts” to Nigeria to combat Boko Haram and troops to West Africa under the pretext of the Ebola crisis; and the “pivot to Asia” aimed at encircling both China and Russia.

Even the damning revelations brought to light by Assange have been overshadowed by former US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden’s exposure of systematic spying on the world’s populations by the US in collusion with Britain. Snowden too would be either languishing in prison or dead had he not followed Assange’s lead and claimed asylum in Russia. American filmmaker Laura Poitras was the first person Snowden contacted about his revelations. Poitras was warned by lawyers she faced arrest under the UK Terrorism Act if she attended the premiere in London of *Citizenfour*, her film about Snowden.

The *Guardian*, which heavily redacted the WikiLeaks revelations and then turned on Assange, was nevertheless the target of an unprecedented attack following the release of Snowden’s documents. The British government demanded that the *Guardian* cease publication of any further such exposures, and Prime Minister David Cameron sent intelligence agents to its London offices to oversee the destruction of computers drives containing the Snowden files.

In another chilling act of political intimidation, in August 2013, UK border officials detained and questioned for nine hours David Miranda, the partner of then *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald. Greenwald was pivotal in the publication of Snowden’s exposures. Miranda was held under the British Terrorism Act of 2000, denied the right to a lawyer and the right to remain silent, and had his computer, cell phone, camera and memory sticks containing Snowden documents all seized.

Assange, Manning and Snowden have been targeted by a criminal political elite that will stop at nothing to silence those who dare expose their crimes and conspiracies. The US is ruled by a government whose state apparatus has carried out systematic and barbaric torture and routinely kills its own citizens on the streets of its cities and towns. It is presided over by a president who regularly signs off on global kill lists. In September 2011, Obama authorised the murder of an American citizen, Anwar al-Awlaki. Awlaki, a 40-year-

old Muslim cleric born in New Mexico, was killed along with three others in Yemen, by a missile fired from a drone. Also killed in the strike was another US citizen, Samir Khan.

Workers and young people must demand the freedom of Assange, Snowden and Manning and fight for an end to their persecution. This demand and the defence of all basic democratic right are bound up with the development of a mass political and social movement of workers and youth against imperialism based upon a socialist and internationalist programme.



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