

Formerly-jailed Australian journalist Peter Greste fronts corporate media attack on Julian Assange

Mike Head
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Literally within hours of the April 11 arrest of Julian Assange, a scurrilous and craven attack on the WikiLeaks founder was featured by the erstwhile “liberal” media—the Melbourne *Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and other Nine Media outlets.

The opinion column was penned by a journalist who was once incarcerated himself on trumped-up charges. Peter Greste declared: “To be clear, Julian Assange is not a journalist, and WikiLeaks is not a news organisation.”

By that pronouncement, Greste aligned himself directly behind the Trump administration’s bogus “conspiracy” charges and the refusal of the Australian political establishment to intervene to secure the freedom of Assange, an Australian citizen.

To the disgust of those whose protests helped free Greste in 2015 from his 400-day imprisonment by the US-backed military junta, headed by ex-general Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, he is now trading on the reputation he acquired as a victim of attacks on press freedom to support Washington’s efforts to railroad Assange to prison.

Greste wrote the column in his capacity as “a founding director and spokesman for the Alliance for Journalists’ Freedom and UNESCO chair in journalism and communication at the University of Queensland.” In it, he set out, in unvarnished form, the agenda behind all the corporate media attacks on Assange.

Greste declared: “Journalism demands more than simply acquiring confidential information and releasing it unfiltered onto the internet for punters to sort through. It comes with responsibility. To effectively fulfil the role of journalism in a democracy, there is an obligation to seek out *what is genuinely in the public*

interest [italics added].”

But who determines the “public interest”? It is absolutely in the public’s interest to know the truth about the hundreds of cases of war crimes, corporate abuses and mass surveillance revealed by WikiLeaks and the courageous whistleblowers who give it incriminating documents.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has recorded, Assange and WikiLeaks have, since 2006, established an extraordinary record of genuine investigative journalism, unparalleled in contemporary history. Thanks to WikiLeaks, millions of documents exposing political conspiracies and corporate crimes around the world have been made available to the public. If not for WikiLeaks, this information would have remained suppressed.

WikiLeaks states on its website: “Our goal is to bring important news and information to the public. We provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for sources to leak information to our journalists (our electronic drop box). One of our most important activities is to publish original source material alongside our news stories so readers and historians alike can see evidence of the truth.”

In effect, Greste is insisting that the corporate- and government-controlled media, notorious for working in collaboration with the intelligence agencies, must continue to determine what is in the “public interest” and censor the news accordingly.

These are the same discredited organisations that for decades have retailed lies such as “weapons of mass destruction,” to justify the invasions conducted by the US and its allies. Over the past decade, millions of people have turned to social media for information,

precisely because they no longer trust the corporate outlets.

According to Greste: “The digital revolution has confused the definitions of what journalism is and its role in a democracy.” He wrote: “We at the Alliance for Journalists’ Freedom are committed to restoring public trust in journalism, which can only ever happen if its practitioners work with responsibility and respect.”

“Responsibility and respect” for whom? For the public, and its right to know, or for the corporate elite, the spy agencies and their political servants? By Greste’s definition, no one is a legitimate journalist unless they “respect” the existing powers-that-be.

Greste acknowledged that in 2010, WikiLeaks published “a huge trove” of incriminating military and US State Department documents, including “the infamous ‘collateral murder’ video filmed from the gunshots of two US Apache helicopters as they opened fire on a group of men in Baghdad, including two Reuters journalists, killing them all.”

But Greste condemned Assange for actually making this information available to millions of people around the world. “Instead of sorting through the hundreds of thousands of files to seek out the most important or relevant and protect the innocent, he dumped them all onto his website, free for anybody to go through, regardless of their contents or the impact they might have had.”

That is precisely what governments, intelligence agencies and corporate media fear: the public having unfiltered, uncensored, access to secret files that disclose such crimes. “The impact,” as demonstrated by WikiLeaks’ record, can inform popular discontent and even lead to mass uprisings, as occurred in Tunisia in 2011, when workers and youth toppled a dictatorship that had been in power for decades.

Greste repeated the unsubstantiated claims of the US intelligence apparatus that WikiLeaks had “exposed the names of Afghans who had been giving information on the Taliban to US forces.” In reality, no evidence has been presented proving that anyone, apart from war criminals and corrupt politicians, has been harmed by the information published by WikiLeaks.

Greste is supporting a definite agenda. It is that of corporate giants such as Google and Facebook, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned over the past 18

months. They are working with governments to censor the internet and, in particular, suppress independent, progressive or left-wing platforms that provide oppositional information and analysis.

Greste’s recently-established “Alliance for Journalists’ Freedom” is backed by Google, one of its “founding partners,” which has a representative on its advisory board. The Alliance website is promoting Mark Zuckerberg’s recent announcement that Facebook intends to launch a new news service to strengthen “high quality, trustworthy journalism.”

Greste and the organisation he represents are functioning as mouthpieces for the interests of governments, intelligence agencies, the corporate media and the on-line conglomerates. That is why they are so hostile to the publication of any material that threatens the capitalist order and the predatory interests of US imperialism and its British and Australian partners.

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