

Blinken's denunciation of Assange exposes Australian government's phony posturing

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Last weekend, Antony Blinken launched a full-throated denunciation of Julian Assange, whom the Biden administration is seeking to extradite and prosecute for exposing US-led war crimes. The US secretary of state chose to make his first substantive comments on the WikiLeaks publisher, standing alongside Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong in Brisbane.

Blinken's comments and Wong's acquiescence exposed the fraud that the Labor government is in any way seeking to free Assange, a persecuted Australian citizen and journalist. Instead, Wong and other government representatives unveiled far-reaching agreements for further US basing arrangements in the country and other measures aimed at preparing for war against China.

In the week since Blinken's outburst, Labor and its supporters have sought to limit the political damage. They are fearful of the significant popular support for Assange and of their own complicity in his persecution being revealed.

In comments to the media on Tuesday, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese sought to dampen-down anger and concern over Blinken's comments. "What Secretary Blinken did was just state, consistent with what the American position has been," Albanese said. "We remain very firm in our view and in our representations to the American government and we will continue to do so."

Both statements were completely false.

Blinken could have sidestepped the question, as he has previously. Instead, he launched into a tirade against Assange. The top US official deliberately repeated all the strands of the US frame-up of the WikiLeaks publisher.

He claimed that Assange had been involved in one of the "largest compromises of classified information in the history of our country," which had "risked very serious harm to our national security." This was a straight repetition of the US indictment, which seeks to criminalise Assange's journalistic activities, i.e., his publication of documents exposing vast US war crimes, coup plots, spying and other violations of international law.

Blinken chose to repeat the canard that Assange "put

named human sources at grave risk." That inflammatory assertion is at the centre of the US indictment of Assange, even though multiple US government representatives have been compelled to acknowledge, under oath, there is no indication that a single individual was physically harmed as a result of the WikiLeaks publications.

Taken together, Blinken's statements made crystal clear that the US is proceeding with its attempt to extradite Assange from Britain and to prosecute him on Espionage Act charges that carry a maximum sentence of 175 years' imprisonment.

The determination to continue the frame-up is bound up with its broader significance. Amid an explosion of US militarism, including the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the drive to conflict with China, the US is using the Assange case to intimidate anti-war opposition across the board.

Albanese's blithe dismissal of the significance of Blinken's remarks underscores the Labor government's complicity in the persecution of the WikiLeaks founder. If it were in any way defending Assange, Albanese would be compelled to refute Blinken's obvious lies and publicly insist on the urgent necessity for Assange to be freed.

Instead, the Labor government has vaguely stated that "enough is enough" and the Assange case has "gone on too long." At no point has it branded the prosecution a frame-up or placed demands on the US. There is no written record of any government department making representations to the US on Assange's behalf. At the same time, the Labor government has accelerated Australia's transformation into a frontline state for the US-led preparations for war with China.

The Blinken statement was discussed in the Australian Senate on Wednesday evening.

The Greens introduced a discussion of a "matter of public interest," on the topic that "The Albanese Government should use our close relationship with the United States of America and the United Kingdom to free Julian Assange and bring him home."

Greens Senator David Shoebridge outlined the decade-long pursuit of Assange by the US. He stated: “The real reason Julian Assange is still in jail is that, whether it’s Prime Minister Albanese or Prime Minister Morrison, Australian leaders are willing to trade a citizen’s liberty, their right to speak truth to power, for a close and unquestioning bear hug from a US president. They say truth is the first victim of war and, in the case of Julian Assange, that’s a truth the whole world is seeing.”

Shoebridge added: “The Albanese government, it’s true, have raised the imprisonment and extradition of Julian Assange when speaking privately with their US counterparts. They have had quiet chats, maybe a carefully worded communiqué, but they’ve never even put a single element of the Australia-US relationship on the line for Julian’s freedom.

“Days ago, in Brisbane, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken launched an extraordinary attack on Julian Assange. He backed in allegations that Julian had not only engaged in serious criminal conduct but had risked harm to US national security. All the while, Australia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator Wong, stood by mutely, not defending Julian and accepting Blinken’s lies. It was almost as though she believed them.”

Another Greens Senator Peter Whish-Wilson stated: “Mr Albanese has been able to run his line about quiet diplomacy with some success, until last week. Last week the US made it abundantly clear that they are not for the turning on this. That’s an exposure of the failure of Mr Albanese’s quiet diplomacy, and it’s an exposure of the failure of Senator Wong’s quiet diplomacy. What we need is for the prime minister and the foreign minister to make it clear to Mr Biden that freedom for Mr Assange is a non-negotiable in this relationship.”

The Labor government left it to Senator Linda White, a little-known MP elected only last year, to respond. She made vague statements of concern over Assange’s health. But the essential thrust of her remarks was that Assange was subject to foreign “legal proceedings” and there was virtually nothing the Labor government could do.

These “legal proceedings” are the extradition attempt, which have been branded as a gross violation of international law and a frontal assault on press freedom by United Nations officials, human rights groups and major publications. Labor has not issued a single diplomatic demand, or threat, nor sought to place public pressure on the Biden administration.

Labor’s sole preoccupation is with diverting the widespread support for Assange back behind the parliamentary establishment, and covering up its collaboration in the campaign against the WikiLeaks

publisher.

But the same could be said of the Greens themselves. For years and years, they said virtually nothing on Assange. Even as several MPs belatedly broke their silence, the Greens rejected calls, including from within their own ranks, for a party-wide campaign fighting for Assange’s freedom.

Instead, the Greens have participated in and promoted a cross-party parliamentary grouping that purportedly defends Assange. In it, they have collaborated uncritically with Labor MPs, whose sole purpose has been to shield the Albanese government from criticism and to promote the fraud that it is doing something to secure Assange’s release, when it is patently not.

This is not an aberration. The Greens’ entire perspective is to come to a power-sharing arrangement with Labor. That was the central thrust of their campaign in the 2022 federal election, during which together with Labor they excluded the issue of Assange.

There is a long record, moreover. The 2010–11 Labor government participated in the initial stages of the US campaign against Assange, including by branding him a criminal and attempting to illegally cancel his passport, and was a de facto coalition with the Greens. Some Greens MPs bemoaned these actions, while insisting they would not affect the formal agreement of the party to prop up the Labor government.

The current posturing of the Greens is ultimately aimed at bolstering the illusion that Assange’s freedom can be secured through parliament. Their “public interest” discussion in the Senate required no vote to be taken. At the same time, their calls for Albanese to leverage the US-Australia alliance to secure the WikiLeaks publisher’s freedom are utterly reactionary. They express the Greens’ underlying support for Australian imperialism’s participation in the war drive against China. In reality, that participation and their complicity in the persecution of Assange go hand in hand.

The real lesson that must be drawn from the events of the past week and longer is that the fight for Assange’s freedom requires a political struggle by the working class against the Labor government itself. The urgent struggle for Assange’s liberty must be fused with the fight to develop an international anti-war movement, based on a socialist perspective, to halt the drive to world war and the sweeping attacks on democratic rights that inevitably accompany it.



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