

Interviews

The Assange case

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Many thanks indeed to “Me in Us” for this transcript.

00:12 ONN: Hello. We’re here today at the home of Craig Murray, the whistleblower and former ambassador to Uzbekistan. Craig, thank you for being here with us on ON today. On Sunday you spoke out publicly defending Julian Assange in giving a speech in front of the Ecuadorean assembly. What made you want to stand up and be counted as among his supporters?

CRAIG MURRAY: Well, the main reason is that I’ve been a whistleblower myself and active with other whistleblowers, and I’ve seen so many whistleblowers fitted up with false charges, and as soon as anybody blows the whistle, particularly on any aspects of, if you like, neoconservative foreign policy and war, you’re going to get fitted up and you’re going to get defamed with false charges, and if you’re male I think in every case those charges are going to involve sexual allegations. So I could just see, if you like, a miscarriage of justice in the process of being done, and I wanted to do anything I can to help stop it.

01:16 ONN: You said that individual whistleblowers are not charged with political offenses, they are fit up with criminal ones. Would you care to elaborate on that?

CRAIG MURRAY: Yes, certainly, and I’ll give a few examples. James Yee, who was a chaplain at Guantanamo Bay, he blew the whistle on torture and mistreatment of inmates at Guantanamo Bay. He was first of all charged with espionage and acts of espionage benefiting a foreign country. Then those charges were dropped and he was charged with adultery, which apparently under US military law is an offense, and he was charged with having pornography on his government computer at work, and he was convicted of both of those, and then later the conviction was overturned.

Brigadier Janis Karpinski was the lady in charge of all Iraqi prisoners of war in Iraq, not just at Abu Ghraib. She was in charge of all military installations. She wasn’t actually at Abu Ghraib, and actually she’d only ever been to Abu Ghraib once. When the story broke about all the torture at Abu Ghraib, she came forward and she said that she had personally seen a document signed by Donald Rumsfeld detailing forms of torture to be used at Abu Ghraib, including stress positions, including threatening naked prisoners with dogs. She said those techniques were detailed in the document which was signed by Donald Rumsfeld. She was recalled to the United States, and the day after she returned to the United States she was allegedly caught shoplifting and charged with shoplifting.

Scott Ritter was an Iraqi weapons inspector on the same UN team as David Kelly. He was a captain in the US Marines. He stated that there were no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. On his return to the United States he was entrapped in a computer sex honey trap by an FBI agent, and this was admitted in court, that it was an FBI agent who entrapped him.

03:51 ONN: For those who don’t know, what does this term “honey trap” refer to?

CRAIG MURRAY: Honey trap is where you put, if you like, sexual bait in order to catch someone, to entice someone into a sexual act which they otherwise might not have committed had you not put the temptation right in their way. It’s a term frequently used in espionage and diplomatic circles because it’s a well-known technique of the security services. And Scott Ritter fell for this honey trap and he was actually convicted of pedophilia, because although the agent in concern was an adult female, she was using an Internet persona of an underage person. But — and Scott Ritter’s case is the only one where I think there may be any truth at all in the allegations, and in his case it wouldn’t have happened, the whole thing wouldn’t have happened had the FBI not set up the situation and gone out to get him.

And I should say these are all people I knew personally. Two of them are people I knew before they were accused. And it happens to everyone. And the same thing happened to me. I blew the whistle on British complicity in torture, MI6's complicity with torture in Uzbekistan and on extraordinary rendition. I was immediately charged with sexual allegations, in effect with extorting sex from visa applicants. It took me, you know, 18 months of real hell, to be honest, to clear my name. Because, you know, I know once people throw those kind of allegations at you, it tarnishes your name forever. It's very easy to destroy someone's reputation by sexual allegations.

So, for me, the absolutely extraordinary thing is that, you know, after this has happened to James Yee, happened to me, happened to Scott Ritter, happened to Janis Karpinski, they pulled the same trick again and again, and now it's pulling it with Julian Assange, and anybody taking seriously these accusations astonishes me, because the idea that people just can't see what is happening in the world and the way that whistleblowers are being persecuted, to me it's astonishing. And the fact that none of what I've just said to you will you find reported in the mainstream media, you know, ought to really, really alarm people about the kind of world we live in.

06:30 ONN: Yes, there does seem to be a rather consistent failure by the mainstream media to address these issues. I mean, in your opinion, are journalists doing their job right?

CRAIG MURRAY: No. I mean, it seems to me there is very little actual journalism in the what you might call the paid media. And part of that, of course, is that, you know, the media is owned by a very small number of people, and really people have to write what their bosses want them to write. It's very, very difficult to get the truth into the media on any subject at all. On top of which also, of course, newspapers actually employ far less journalists than they used to. There used to be a time when individual newspapers in Fleet Street had 30 or 40 foreign correspondents per newspaper. There aren't actually now 30 or 40 foreign correspondents between the whole of the British newspaper industry. So just the number of them has gone down, and mostly they spend their time, you know, cutting and pasting government press releases and putting out the story, the story which the people who own the papers want them to hear.

The same goes for broadcast media, which again has precisely the same restricted private ownership, unless it's owned by the government. Though the government of course is owned by the same people who own the newspapers — it really doesn't make a great deal of difference.

08:10 ONN: So what do you think about the actual allegations, the actual substance of the allegations made against Julian Assange? I mean, is there any evidence at all that you can see of — ?

CRAIG MURRAY: I mean, to some extent it almost doesn't matter because, as I say, having been through it myself and having seen all the whistleblowers I know go through it, it was only a matter of time before they did it to Julian Assange. So the question of what they charged him with or what evidence they managed to fake is almost irrelevant.

I would say, I think, you know, choosing rape and sexual allegations is very clever. The CIA do know what they are doing. Firstly, because nothing tarnishes your name in that way. People might forgive you for being a bank robber, they might even eventually forgive you for being a murderer, if you said you did it in the heat of the moment, but nobody will ever forgive you for being a rapist or a pedophile. So the choice of allegation is very clever.

Also, it splits the left. If the Birmingham Six had been charged with rape, they would still be in jail today, because nobody would ever have been allowed *in public campaigning* to query the evidence against them, because unfortunately, because of the genuine problems with rape, genuine rape, going unpunished in society, the reaction to that has been that many perfectly decent people think the only way to correct that imbalance is by removing essentially all protection to people accused of rape. And that view is deeply held by genuine and decent people who are concerned about the position of women in society. But once you have a social acceptance that you ought not to be allowed *in public discourse* to challenge people making accusations of rape, that makes it the perfect tool for a security service to use, because everyone has agreed in advance that it's the one crime that no one's going *in campaigning against miscarriage of justice* to challenge the evidence or challenge the accusers.

And, as I say, you have so many people on the left whose primary political concern is feminism, who are being used as useful idiots by the CIA, who have been sidetracked into vitriolic attacks on Julian Assange, who are

calling people like me rape apologists, just because the CIA has been very, very careful to choose the one accusation which they will always uphold, be it true or not. That's the main problem with the allegations.

But, no, I mean, it is well worth studying the detail both of the allegations themselves and of the people making the allegations and of the procedures which have been adopted. Because even if you didn't know all the background I've given you about how whistleblowers are always fitted up with these allegations, even if you didn't know that, just from a careful close examination of the evidence in this case, which is widely available on the Internet, anybody would conclude this was a fit-up. I don't see how anyone can seriously study the facts of the case and not think it's a fit-up.

11:46 ONN: You mentioned the other day, you were giving an interview, and you mentioned one of Assange's accusers by name, Anna Ardin, and this caused a big uproar. I've been doing some digging and I found out that she is in fact a Social Democrat politician. Do you feel that these are facts that need to be made widely available to public? Do you stand by the fact that you named Anna Ardin as one of his accusers?

CRAIG MURRAY: Absolutely. The most important single point in this is that Anna Ardin named herself. She has given a number of interviews to the media under her own name accusing Julian Assange, the first one of which I can find was in August of 2010. But I found at least 30 media interviews that she has given where she is reported as Anna Ardin making these accusations. Now the idea — and saying that she does not work for the CIA. It was interesting that she feels the need to say that. Most of us don't go around denying we work for the CIA. And also saying that, you know, Assange is a misogynist and a rapist and goodness knows what else.

The idea that you should be able to make such accusations to the media — I don't mean privately in court — that you should be able under your own name to make such media accusations and nobody should be allowed to reply to you and nobody should be allowed to use your name, even though you put it yourself in the newspapers, is sort of Kafkaesque. I actually cannot understand for the life of me why I ought not be allowed to use it when she openly puts it in the public domain herself.

And there are, you know, over 200,000 Google hits on her name, and she has been named in the mainstream media of every single major country I can find except for the UK. She's been named in the New York Times. She's been named in the Times of India. She's been named in Paris Match. She's been named in La Republica. She's been named in Der Spiegel. The UK is actually the only country where she has never been named by the mainstream media, which again is very strange.

But, no, she herself is a character with a very, very interesting history and very, very interesting ties, political ties, which don't relate only to the Social Democrat Party in Sweden but that network of people in the police, the prosecution and Anna Ardin who are all connected, who are all working on this case together, who all have party links, is something which would itself make the case inadmissible in any decent jurisdiction. But she also has a history that relates to work with CIA-funded agencies in Miami and Cuba and Buenos Aires. So the more people study Anna Ardin, the better.

15:04 ONN: You'll be referring, of course, to the Ladies in White, a feminist organization in Cuba based in Miami as well. Is that —

CRAIG MURRAY: That's right. Look, she has an interesting and varied history of working in causes which, let's say where there's a mutual area of interest in South America with the CIA.

15:33 ONN: It's also interesting now that it is Ecuador that has come out, that originally granted protection to Assange within the embassy and has now granted him full asylum. So if extradited to Sweden, what do you think would be the fate that would await Julian Assange there?

CRAIG MURRAY: Well, his fear is that he would very quickly be extradited on from Sweden to the United States, either extradited or rendered. And the Swedes actually now have a sort of legal rendition law for speedy temporary rendition to the United States, as it's called. That's what is worrying Julian Assange. Though I should say, I mean, my experience of the way they treat whistleblowers and my experience of what we have seen of the process in Sweden, I would say there must be just as big a fear that he will be unjustly convicted of rape, which I'm quite sure he hasn't done. But if he arrives in Sweden, he will immediately be jailed. There's no provision for bail. And the thing which most people don't understand is that rape trials in Sweden are held entirely in secret, so nobody would ever see any of the evidence. The next thing we will hear is the verdict. My

own view is the most likely scenario is that it's been cooked up well in advance and that verdict will be guilty. And it's very possible to do that because not only is the trial held in secret but there is no jury.

Now I'm not one of those people who believes that only the British system of law is okay. Many countries have different systems and often those systems work very well. But what you do have with the jury system is a situation where ordinary men and women do have that chance to stand up to the authorities and to say what they believe to be true. It may not be a chance that they take very often, but that possibility is there. Where you don't have a jury, as in Sweden, the chances of the government if it wishes to seriously influencing the result are pretty firm.

18:15 I would look at the Jean Charles de Menezes inquest, for example, in the United Kingdom. In that case, the judge, who's appointed by the government – and remember that it's basically a government decision not just which judges get appointed but allocating judges to particular cases. In that case the judge, and sadly his name's escaped me because he was a complete bloody disgrace, he gave a summing up which was totally tendentious and in which he said that the jury would not be allowed to return a verdict of unlawful killing, and he would only give them the choice of two verdicts, one of which was an open verdict, and the other one was that the killing had been lawful, but he wouldn't let allow them to bring a verdict of unlawful killing, he would rule that verdict out of order, which again is a complete disgrace. He made absolutely plain that the verdict he wanted was that it was lawful. But it didn't happen. The jury came back and said no, we're going to bring back an open verdict. And they did, much to the annoyance of the judge.

19:37 The Clive Ponting case, when he leaked the fact that the Belgrano was actually sailing away from the Falkland Islands at the time it was destroyed with hundreds of people killed, he was charged with that under the Official Secrets Act. There was no doubt he was guilty. He was undoubtedly technically guilty. The judge said so, pretty well, in his summing up of that case. And the jury basically told the judge to get knotted and found him not guilty. So there's always that possibility with a jury system.

Assange wouldn't have a jury. He would be judged by a professional judge and two lay assessors. And the lay assessors are actually party political appointments, quite literally. One will be appointed by the Swedish Conservative Party and one by the Swedish Social Democratic party. The Swedish Conservative Party is very strongly aligned to George Bush and the neocons and the Social Democratic Party are precisely the people that Anna Ardin and the prosecutor and the police investigator and Anna Ardin's lawyer all come from. So, there is every chance that this secret process would result in a complete stitch-up.

And I think although people have focused on the fear of him being extradited from Sweden to the United States, and I think that's true and I think it's legitimate, my personal view is an even bigger danger is of a secret trial where nobody ever gets to know what the evidence was and they announce to a complacent media that he's been found guilty of rape at the end of it.

21:17 ONN: And then it's a done deal and there can be no preventing it.

CRAIG MURRAY: Exactly. Then it's a done deal and they shove him in jail for 10 years. Then when at the end of that period he comes out, he's sent over to the United States and tried on terrorism charges, whatever, and by that stage, of course, he's a convicted rapist as far as the media is concerned, and anyway 10 years have passed and nobody cares anymore.

21:40 ONN: That would be a terrible outcome. What would you think, do you think would be the result if William Hague carried out his threat to storm the Ecuadorean embassy at this point?

CRAIG MURRAY: Well, it's an absolutely astonishing threat. I should say that I know for certain from colleagues, ex-colleagues within the Foreign Office, that in issuing that threat, William Hague was very closely pushed by the Americans. He was under a lot of pressure from the United States of America to get Assange to Sweden. Which again, you know, rather contradicts those who say he would be under no fear of extradition if he went to Sweden. Why are the Americans so keen to get him there? Why are they interested?

But it was an astonishing threat, because everyone in the world, except perhaps the heads of government in the United Kingdom and the United States, would view that as a grossly illegal act. It would be an absolute diplomatic outrage and it would be a, you know, a crime of aggression against Ecuador. The diplomatic repercussions would be astonishing for the United Kingdom. First of all, no British embassy would be safe around the world, because everyone would say, "Well, we can do the same as you, we can de-designate your

embassy and move in and take it over.” And secondly, our relations with not just Latin America but most of the developing world at least would be very, very seriously set back.

And you must remember that we have enough problems in Latin America already. First of all we’ve got the crazy jingoistic, on both sides, dispute over the Falkland Islands. Then you’ve got the fact we would not extradite Pinochet when we’re so keen on extraditing Assange for offenses which even if they were true wouldn’t add up to a hundred thousandth of what Pinochet did. And then you have, of course, as I said earlier, the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes. The idea that the Metropolitan Police, having killed Jean Charles de Menezes, we would let them launch a physical attack on a Latin American embassy, is just astonishing.

So you know the repercussions would be enormous. And I think Hague has absolutely made a fool of himself because he’s made a threat which it would be totally disastrous were he to carry it out.

24:24 ONN: And what about the legality of such a thing? Using the 1987 Diplomatic Consular Premises Act is what Hague said, the legislation he said he’d use?

CRAIG MURRAY: Well, this is just utter nonsense because it can’t trump international law. You can’t have domestic legislation which is in conflict with international law, particularly an international treaty to which we are a party. We were actually I think the second signatory on the 1961 Vienna Convention, and it’s the single most subscribed to international treaty in the world. And interestingly enough, even the 1987 act in itself says that its provisions must be in accordance with international law, and it actually says that even in the 1987 act. Well it would be completely against international law for Hague to do what he’s planned to do. Article 22 of the Vienna Convention, Part 1, states absolutely baldly, without any qualification at all, that diplomatic premises are inviolable. Full stop. And they are. You know, you’re not allowed to enter anybody else’s diplomatic premises.

Even in the chaos of Afghanistan, Britain abandoned its embassy in Afghanistan, withdrew all its diplomats. I’m not sure of that. I don’t think we were chucked out. I think we left voluntarily. But at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Britain withdrew, and our embassy sat there empty for decades, through the Soviet occupation, through the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, and the embassy building was only opened up again – although eventually we moved to new premises, it’s not the building we’re in now – but the original embassy building was only opened up again after the invasion in 2001, 2002. But it had been, for 20 years, it had sat there empty, under the Soviets and under the Taliban, and neither the Soviets nor the Taliban had entered the British embassy. Even though there was nobody there except a resident Afghan caretaker, they accepted the inviolability of embassy premises and they didn’t enter it, not the Soviets nor the Taliban. Now William Hague is proposing we should act much, much worse than either the Soviets or the Taliban, and this to me is absolutely astonishing. It beggars belief.

27:18 ONN: Okay, just one more question before we wrap up here, which was, what do you think the actual chances of Julian Assange running the gauntlet, so to speak, and making it to Ecuador safely? Do you see a way that he can manage to leave Britain now and get there to South America in safety?

CRAIG MURRAY: Physically it’s going to be very difficult. The chances of getting to Ecuador from the embassy in the middle of London without the agreement of the British authorities are limited. You can, you know, we can all think of sort of physical escape scenarios, but they’re not easy. There’s going to have to be a diplomatic solution. My guess would be that it will take a long while in coming, I think six months from now. There’s not going to be much public awareness that anything has changed, although talks will have been going on behind the scenes.

The obvious solution is for the Swedes to agree that they won’t extradite him to the United States, but the Swedes absolutely refuse to do that, and the United States refuses to say that it won’t apply for extradition, because frankly there’s no doubt whatsoever that the United States has convened a grand jury to look at prosecuting Assange and Wikileaks and has every intention of extraditing him to the United States. So all of that is very, very difficult.

You can see a kind of Lockerbie solution. The alleged Lockerbie bomber, Mr. Megrahi, was tried in the Hague under Scottish law by Scottish judges because they didn’t want to send him to Scotland and they agreed to hold the trial on mutual premises, and the Dutch agreed that a court in the Hague could actually be in effect under Scottish law for the period of the trial. It’s not the happiest precedent, because I think the trial was itself a

stitch-up and a miscarriage of justice, but it does set a precedent for somebody being tried by another state on somebody else's territory, so there is a precedent in international law if people were looking for that.

Now, as I've said myself, my own view is that a condition of any trial should be that it should be public. I think this case is so high-profile that people are entitled to know what evidence has been given, are entitled to know what the defense is, and frankly the defense is so strong that it would make it very, very difficult to do a stitch-up conviction. So something along those lines.

I really do not know at this stage what the end game is. The hope of the British government is that the Ecuadorean government will change. There's an election coming up in Ecuador in the not so distant future. The British and American governments are relying on President Correa's opponents — and his opponents are of course backed by the CIA anyway — will manage to win that election and then cancel his diplomatic asylum and hand him over, and that's the end game as far as the British and Americans are concerned. So my guess is that they will wait for the outcome of the Ecuadorean election. I don't think they will make any compromise at all until after the Ecuadorean election, in the hope that the government of Ecuador changes and that they will get a, basically a US puppet administration in Ecuador which will just hand him over.

31:49 ONN: Well, thank you very much for speaking with us today, Mr. Murray. It's been fascinating and very informative. And thank you to our viewers. Thank you for watching this ONN interview. I hope you've enjoyed it. Okay.

CRAIG MURRAY: Thank you.

* I have added in italics phrases on one particular point where I thought my meaning was obvious in context, but evidently from comments on another thread it was not.