

# An Interview with WikiLeaks' Assange

CIA Director Pompeo says WikiLeaks will be dealt with as a “hostile intelligence” service, raising the stakes in the long-running U.S. government feud with Julian Assange, interviewed by Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Wikileaks founder and editor Julian Assange is still under attack with CIA Director Mike Pompeo recently describing the whistleblowing publication as a “non-state hostile intelligence” service and a target of CIA countermeasures.

“I think our intelligence community has a lot of work in figuring out how to respond,” Pompeo told a security summit in Aspen, Colorado, on July 20. Despite such threats, Assange continues his WikiLeaks work from inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London where he was given asylum five years ago.

Assange was interviewed as a guest on the WBAI Radio show, Live on the Fly with Randy Credico and guest co-host Dennis Bernstein, executive producer of Flashpoints on Pacifica Radio.

Randy Credico: Julian Assange, I just wanted to mention something that happened to me yesterday. A woman named Laura Krause called me last night. She is the sister of Allison Krause, one of the four students who were killed at Kent State on May 4, 1970, by the National Guard. She expressed her gratitude to WikiLeaks for finding and preserving some very important documents relating to that tragic event.

Julian Assange: Interestingly, we didn’t intend to specifically publish Kent State documents. It was part of our large archive of cable documents from the 1970s called “The Kissinger Cables.” Often when you take the internal communications of the State Department or another powerful organization, it tends to touch on nearly everything. And the public’s ability to spot relevant connections in your material often greatly outstrips your own.

I am always extremely irritated with journalists who sit upon hordes of historical treasure detailing how our institutions actually behave. The public’s ability to take this information and connect it to their own personal histories, using it in litigation and political campaigns, is actually much greater than the rather narrow character of any particular journalist or editor, including myself.

Dennis Bernstein: I just got off the phone with Oliver Stone, who is being shredded everywhere because he had the temerity to do a series of interviews

with Vladimir Putin. Have you had the opportunity to see any of the interviews?

JA: I've seen all four. The last one was recorded after the US elections so it takes place within the context of this neo-McCarthyist Russia hysteria. Putin is the consummate politician, especially within Russia but also when dealing with the world. You cannot completely hide who you are over the course of four hours, and lots of little interesting things came out.

For example, in the third episode, Oliver Stone shows Vladimir Putin *Dr. Strangelove*, which Putin says he has never seen before. If he has genuinely never seen the film before, he has to be careful because he doesn't know how each scene or the film as a whole is going to pan out. At the end he says, "Well, that's interesting, they even predicted some of the technical issues." And he points out that not much has changed in the dynamics of power.

Oliver Stone hands Putin the DVD case and Putin walks into another room in the Kremlin. When he comes back there is a slight smirk on his face and he shows the empty case to the camera and says, "Typical American gift." Actually, he probably knew already that the case was empty when Stone gave it to him.

DB: Julian, I would love to turn your attention to some of the breaking news around your struggle. I understand that your legal crew has taken your case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Can you talk about the significance of that?

JA: Well, it's significant for refugee law worldwide. I am very proud to have triggered it in some way. It is Ecuador that has formally gone to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Most of the members of the OAS [Organization of American States] respect their rulings, while the US considers them only as advisory. It is one of the most highly regarded legal bodies in the world, two others being the European and UN Human Rights Commissions.

In my case, Ecuador has the view that there are several human rights issues that have developed which require a proper hearing. Of particular concern are the obligations on states to assess refugee status and offer protection and how refugees should be processed outside the domestic territory, for example, in embassies, UN compounds, aboard ships, etc.

This bears on my situation but it also has a strong bearing on the situation in Syria and other places where you have refugees who are fleeing persecution taking long, dangerous treks into neighboring countries. If you process these refugees very close to their places of origin, you are going to save lives. It should be standardized how these people are processed, regardless of embassy or whatever.

I think this is the most significant consideration of refugee law since 1969, when the optional protocol on the 1951 Convention on Refugees was signed by many countries at the UN. There was an attempt in 1975 to reconsider the issue, brought about by Australia. In the early seventies you had many refugees fleeing South Vietnam, coming down through the Indonesian archipelago to Australia. At that time Australia wanted to normalize the processing of refugees at its different embassies. The effort was blocked by the Soviet Union and the United States.

Since that time, human rights law has really developed in earnest as a proper legal field, which puts obligations on states not to arbitrarily detain people and so on. Basically, many of these human rights instruments, when properly executed, force states to protect people, or at the very least, give states the right to protect people. If a state is obligated to protect people who are being persecuted, who are being threatened, then according to human rights law those refugees must be taken in.

There is an interlocking of the 1951 convention, the 1967 protocol, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with obligations under refugee law to enable consistency and avoid conflict. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights understands this and Ecuador has been great in taking on the case. There have been 54 amicus curiae from the UNHCR [UN High Commissioner for Refugees], the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Mexico and six other American States, a lot of legal clinics, and so on. We're now waiting on a decision from the Inter-American court but we know that it is definitely going to issue an opinion. They have already decided that this is a very important area of law and a hearing is going to be held in August.

And, like I said, I believe this is the single most important attempt that has been made to harmonize international refugee law. I must say I am happy that something is emerging out of my situation other than just perhaps my freedom.

There is a lot of talk in the United States about the Trump administration's shutting down of migration and tourism to the US from some Muslim countries in the Middle East. I find it strange that there is so little discussion of what I feel is a much more serious situation: the shutting down of all refugee applications for 180 days. It is not reasonable to be accepting tourists from all over the world but not be accepting refugees.

Okay, right now Syria is a very dangerous country to be accepting refugees from, you might have to shut down the system and take some time to reboot the process. But what about refugees from New Zealand or from Mexico? Are these likely to be ISIS people? Absolutely not. And if you are taking tourists from those same countries, it is completely absurd to block refugee processing.

DB: Julian, this may be a naive question but...

JA: Dennis, you know what they say: Better to be naive and fight for what's right, because it's the realists who have left the world in the shape that it's in.

DB: Okay, I will just stumble toward the truth here, if I can. Do you consider the information flow out of the DNC to be a hack or a leak?

JA: Well, this is a sourcing question. There have been a lot of flows out of the DNC over a two-year period, seemingly by five different actors, according to statements coming out of US intelligence. Actually, we haven't seen those repeated in 2017. We don't talk about sourcing in that way. We make sure that our publications are completely accurate and that our information did not come from a state actor. We haven't said anything about them and we probably won't, depending on how things develop. Because if we start giving more details, it makes it easier to catch our sources, which we obviously don't want.

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net).**

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