

Biden Hypocritically Slams Arrest of US Journalist in Russia But Pursues Assange

The double standards of the U.S. government are on full display in the lead-up to World Press Freedom Day.

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May 3, 2023, will mark the 30th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, which the United Nations established to remind governments about the need to respect their commitment to freedom of the press. But as the Biden administration proclaims the centrality of press freedom globally, its hypocrisy in pursuing journalist and publisher Julian Assange is stunning.

The Biden administration recently expressed outrage that Russia arrested journalist Evan Gershkovich of *The Wall Street Journal*, a United States citizen based in Moscow, for practicing journalism. Gershkovich is now incarcerated in Russia, facing espionage charges that could garner him 20 years in prison. His appeal to lift his pretrial detention was just denied and he was refused a consular visit.

Meanwhile, however, the Biden administration continues to demand the extradition of Australian national Assange for obtaining and publishing evidence of U.S. war crimes.

Both Gershkovich and Assange are journalists detained in a foreign country on espionage charges for doing what journalists do.

Assange has been locked up in a maximum-security prison in London for four years while President Joe Biden's regime continues former President Donald Trump's attempts to prosecute him under the Espionage Act. If extradited, tried and convicted, Assange could be sentenced to 175 years. He is the first publisher ever charged under the Espionage Act for revealing state secrets. His appeal is pending in the United Kingdom High Court.

“Journalism is Not a Crime”

On March 30, the Russian Federal Security Service announced it had detained Gershkovich, [alleging](#) that he “was acting on instructions from the American side to collect information about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex that constitutes a state secret.”

“We are deeply concerned” about Gershkovich’s detention, Biden’s press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, said in a [statement](#). “The targeting of American citizens by the Russian government is unacceptable. We condemn the detention of Mr. Gershkovich in the strongest terms.”

“Journalism is not a crime,” Biden [declared](#) at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner.

Likewise, in a rare joint statement, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell called on Russia to immediately release Gershkovich. “Journalism is not a crime,” they [wrote](#).

“Publishing Is Not a Crime”

On November 28, 2022, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *El País*, *Le Monde* and *Der Spiegel* signed a [joint open letter](#) urging the U.S. government to dismiss the Espionage Act charges against Assange for publishing classified diplomatic and military secrets.

“Publishing is not a crime,” the newspapers wrote. “The U.S. government should end its prosecution of Julian Assange for publishing secrets.”

In 2010, those five media outlets collaborated with Assange’s *WikiLeaks* to publish “Cablegate,” consisting of 251,000 confidential U.S. State Department cables that “disclosed corruption, diplomatic scandals and spy affairs on an international scale.” According to *The New York Times*, the documents [revealed](#) “the unvarnished story of how the government makes its biggest decisions, the decisions that cost the country most heavily in lives and money.”

Assange’s indictment is also based on *WikiLeaks*’s revelation of the “Iraq War Logs,” which were 400,000 field reports chronicling 15,000 unreported deaths of Iraqi civilians, and the systematic rape, torture and murder after U.S. forces “[handed over detainees to a notorious Iraqi torture squad](#).” The indictment stems as well from the release of the “Afghan War Diary,” consisting of 91,000 reports of a larger number of civilian casualties committed by coalition forces than the U.S. military had reported.

In addition, the 2007 “Collateral Murder” video depicts a U.S. Army Apache attack helicopter targeting and killing 11 unarmed civilians, including two *Reuters* news staff and a man who came to the rescue of the wounded, and the wounding of two children. This video contains evidence of three violations of the Geneva Conventions and the U.S. Army Field Manual.

Congressmembers Call for Dismissal of Charges Against Assange

On the fourth anniversary of Assange’s arrest, Democratic Representatives Rashida Tlaib (Michigan), Jamaal Bowman (New York), Cori Bush (Missouri), Greg Casar (Texas), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (New York), Ilhan Omar (Minnesota) and Ayanna Pressley (Massachusetts) sent a [letter](#) to Attorney General Merrick Garland. They urged the Department of Justice to

affirm the First Amendment's protection of freedom of the press by dropping the charges against Assange and withdrawing the U.S. request for extradition from the U.K.

"Press freedom, civil liberty, and human rights groups have been emphatic that the charges against Mr. Assange pose a grave and unprecedented threat to everyday, constitutionally protected journalistic activity, and that a conviction would represent a landmark setback for the First Amendment," the seven legislators wrote.

They quoted a [letter](#) signed by the American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, Human Rights Watch, Defending Rights and Dissent, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, who wrote: "The indictment of Mr. Assange threatens press freedom because much of the conduct described in the indictment is conduct that journalists engage in routinely — and that they must engage in in order to do the work the public needs them to do."

That conduct includes regularly speaking with sources, requesting clarification or additional documentation, and receiving and publishing documents that the government considers secret. "Such a precedent in this case could effectively criminalize these common journalistic practices," the human rights groups noted.

The representatives' letter cited opposition to Assange's prosecution from leaders around the world, including Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Argentinian President Alberto Fernández, as well as former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer and Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović. The U.S. representatives also referenced similar letters from legislators in the U.K., Australia, Germany and Brazil.

The Biden administration has no standing to object to Russia's arrest of Gershkovich. "As long as the case against Assange continues, it will be a thorn in the side of the U.S. government, and undermines U.S. efforts to defend media freedom globally," [said](#) Rebecca Vincent, director of operations and campaigns at Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders).

On May 3, World Press Freedom Day, several [events](#) are planned around the country calling for the dismissal of charges against Assange and the withdrawal of the U.S. extradition request.

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