



Abby Martin Speech on Julian Assange at National Press Club

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Abby Martin: Thank you so much. It's an honour to be on this panel and to be with all of you here today for this very important call to action. The past eight weeks have been the deadliest on record for journalists, with 60 confirmed killed in Gaza so far. They are being targeted for assassination, many alongside their entire families. The reporters who remain say that their press vests, which should be their protective barrier from bombs and bullets, are actually what is marking them for murder. The genocide in Gaza has been exposed by these heroes. The only way the world knows the depth of crimes committed by the US and Israel, things that would otherwise remain hidden for years, is because journalists are able to document them on their phones and instantly upload them for the world to see. The Iraqi people did not have the capacity to film their reality when a crime of this scale was being committed to them. They had no ability to break through the lies and propaganda disseminated by our so-called free press. Instead, it was whistleblowers like Sergeant Joe Darby, who leaked the infamous Abu Ghraib torture photos, which dealt a major blow to the US war effort. Imagine for one second if the Bush administration locked up the CBS reporter who dared to publish those. Iraqis didn't have social media, but they did have WikiLeaks, which finally showed the world what American forces had kept hidden for so long. Washington worked very hard to control where journalists could access and what they could and could not report. WikiLeaks was the antidote for that lack of free press during what was the greatest atrocity in the modern era. The Iraq War logs forced Americans to confront what the United States was doing in our names. They gave proof to Iraqi society, the extent to which US soldiers had been killing civilians and the revelations made the occupation untenable. Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange helped end the Iraq war. Forgive the repetition, but I think this quote bears repeating. Julian Assange once declared that "if wars can start with lies, peace can start with the truth". Those words ring as our beacon when we

look at the threat that truth poses to power, the powers that decide who lives and who dies, how wars start and how wars end. Truth poses the ultimate threat, indeed. It gives the peons the power to know and the agency to act. That's why Julian Assange is deemed enemy number one. Let's turn to Gaza once again, where not only journalists, but Palestinians who become viral, like our great late friend Refaat Alareer are openly assassinated. Openly assassinated for exposing Israel's crimes. Let's not forget the CIA tried to do the exact same thing to Julian Assange. They wanted to kill him for the same reason that Israel is killing Palestinian journalists. But America is not as brazen as Israel and needs to maintain this veneer of respectability, humanitarianism and democracy. So instead, they chose a different means to the same end; silencing him, punishing him, and taking away his life by throwing him in a dungeon. And they relied on the willing agents of empire, the dutiful media stenographers, to articulate to us why Assange is not a journalist and persecute him at the stake. Assange has been in prison for so long, it actually might be hard to remember what it was like when WikiLeaks came out. It's hard to remember how much of a relief it was to witness an organisation braving the truth, armed with proof, a figurehead that challenged power in such a superb way. Remember what an exciting moment that was. A triumph of public interest journalism, which was finally shining a spotlight on the crimes the Pentagon was committing in the shadows. WikiLeaks was celebrated as the important public service that it was and Assange was heralded as the heroic leader. And as an aspiring journalist, I was so moved by his conviction and voice. So much has happened since he's been gone. Leaders have risen and fallen movements have been sparked and extinguished. Looking back at the legacy of WikiLeaks and how much of its revelations provided a foundational knowledge for the machinations of empire and the state and geopolitics, today I am eternally grateful. We turn to the bloodletting in Gaza. It's because of WikiLeaks that we know about Israel's intent to keep Gaza's economy on the brink of collapse, its people teetering above humanitarian crisis. We can thank WikiLeaks for revealing the strategy of wanting Hamas to govern the Gaza Strip so they can be deemed 2.3 million civilians there a hostile entity worthy of collective punishment and as we've seen plainly today, death. We've all seen how the US government prosecutes whistleblowers with extreme prejudice. No one embarrasses them without paying dearly in prison. But Assange's case took the state's vengeful prosecution to a new and extremely dangerous level. Assange did not steal or leak any government secrets. He never committed any crime. He published and exposed the crimes. That's why the Espionage Act was enacted over 100 years ago to prevent the interference in the war effort. As President Woodrow Wilson stated, when he oversaw the creation of this archaic and draconian law, "such creatures of passion, disloyalty and anarchy must be crushed out". The case against Assange is unprecedented, it breaks new legal ground that has profound implications for not just every journalist, but every citizen. This case criminalises journalism. It criminalises dissent. What's happening to Julian Assange will have a chilling effect that will resonate for generations. This is what will happen to you if you try to replicate Assange's work. This, too, can be your fate if you dare to challenge us. And let's remember, the US government has no credibility on this issue. They weaponize the notion of a free press to only ostracise, sanction and try to kill their enemies, take down governments while their closest enemies are the most

horrific on freedom of the press: Saudi Arabia. Uganda. Israel, right? How can we trust an institution like this to tell us who is a journalist and who is not? Who is worthy of doing journalism? How is it acceptable that the perpetrators of the illegal invasion of Iraq are the ones who get to decide if the man who exposed their crimes is a journalist? We cannot let a conflict of interest of this magnitude prevail. Julian Assange is the voice of the people and we must free him. Thank you.

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