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WikiLeaks and Free Speech

By MICHAEL MOORE and OLIVER STONE

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WE have spent our careers as filmmakers making the case that the news media in the United States often fail to inform Americans about the uglier actions of our own government. We therefore have been deeply grateful for the accomplishments of WikiLeaks, and applaud Ecuador's decision to grant diplomatic asylum to its founder, Julian Assange, who is now living in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London.

Ecuador has acted in accordance with important principles of international human rights. Indeed, nothing could demonstrate the appropriateness of Ecuador's action more than the British government's threat to violate a sacrosanct principle of diplomatic relations and invade the embassy to arrest Mr. Assange.

Since WikiLeaks' founding, it has revealed the "Collateral Murder" footage that shows the seemingly indiscriminate killing of Baghdad civilians by a United States Apache attack helicopter; further fine-grained detail about the true face of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; United States collusion with Yemen's dictatorship to conceal our responsibility for bombing strikes there; the Obama administration's pressure on other nations not to prosecute Bush-era officials for torture; and much more.

Predictably, the response from those who would prefer that Americans remain in the dark has been ferocious. Top elected leaders from both parties have called Mr. Assange a “high-tech terrorist.” And Senator Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat who leads the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, has demanded that he be prosecuted under the Espionage Act. Most Americans, Britons and Swedes are unaware that Sweden has not formally charged Mr. Assange with any crime. Rather, it has issued a warrant for his arrest to question him about allegations of sexual assault in 2010.

All such allegations must be thoroughly investigated before Mr. Assange moves to a country that might put him beyond the reach of the Swedish justice system. But it is the British and Swedish governments that stand in the way of an investigation, not Mr. Assange.

Swedish authorities have traveled to other countries to conduct interrogations when needed, and the WikiLeaks founder has made clear his willingness to be questioned in London. Moreover, the Ecuadorean government made a direct offer to Sweden to allow Mr. Assange to be interviewed within Ecuador’s embassy. In both instances, Sweden refused.

Mr. Assange has also committed to traveling to Sweden immediately if the Swedish government pledges that it will not extradite him to the United States. Swedish officials have shown no interest in exploring this proposal, and Foreign Minister Carl Bildt recently told a legal adviser to Mr. Assange and WikiLeaks unequivocally that Sweden would not make such a pledge. The British government would also have the right under the relevant treaty to prevent Mr. Assange’s extradition to the United States from Sweden, and has also refused to pledge that it would use this power. Ecuador’s attempts to facilitate that arrangement with both governments were rejected.

Taken together, the British and Swedish governments’ actions suggest to us that their real agenda is to get Mr. Assange to Sweden. Because of treaty and other considerations, he probably could be more easily extradited from there to the United States to face charges. Mr. Assange has every reason to fear such an outcome. The Justice Department recently confirmed that it was continuing to investigate WikiLeaks, and just-disclosed Australian government documents from this past February state that “the U.S. investigation into possible criminal conduct by Mr. Assange has been ongoing for more than a year.” WikiLeaks itself has published e-mails from Stratfor, a private intelligence corporation, which state that a grand jury has already returned a [sealed indictment of Mr. Assange](#). And history indicates Sweden would buckle to any pressure from the United States to hand over Mr. Assange. In 2001 the Swedish government delivered two

Egyptians seeking asylum to the C.I.A., which rendered them to the Mubarak regime, which tortured them.

If Mr. Assange is extradited to the United States, the consequences will reverberate for years around the world. Mr. Assange is not an American citizen, and none of his actions have taken place on American soil. If the United States can prosecute a journalist in these circumstances, the governments of Russia or China could, by the same logic, demand that foreign reporters anywhere on earth be extradited for violating their laws. The setting of such a precedent should deeply concern everyone, admirers of WikiLeaks or not.

We urge the people of Britain and Sweden to demand that their governments answer some basic questions: Why do the Swedish authorities refuse to question Mr. Assange in London? And why can neither government promise that Mr. Assange will not be extradited to the United States? The citizens of Britain and Sweden have a rare opportunity to make a stand for free speech on behalf of the entire globe.