

# Can War on Coronavirus and US-China Row Kindle Ethics in the Defense of Julian Assange?

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## ABSTRACT

A year after the fateful arrest and imprisonment of the award-winning journalist-publisher Julian Assange, and his defense against extradition, another pandemic has been inflicting considerable destruction a century after the Spanish flu. But as the Trump administration has pursued Chinese accountability for the outbreak, which has provoked China's reproach, matters of public concern are aggravated by prospects of economic sanctions, economic decoupling, and a new cold war. Can the war on coronavirus and the threat to peace and security posed by the U.S.-China row kindle ethics in defense of the liberty of Assange?

**Keywords-**Wikileaks and Assange, war on coronavirus, Sino-American relations, ethics and democracy

## INTRODUCTION

How have the "coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19)" caused by "severe acute respiratory syndrome 2 (SARS-Cov-2)" (Gorbalenya et al., 2020) and the latest Sino-American tension been sparking a moral challenge in defense of Julian Assange? The jailed co-founder of the non-profit media organization Wikileaks had published materials on war crimes that practically nobody in the public has ever known. Leaked by whistleblowers, the matters have "rattled the world of journalism, diplomacy, and national security" (60 Minutes Rewind, 2011). A year after the arrest of the award-winning journalist-publisher, defending an extradition case to the United States, a "less examined" "threat [sic] to national security" (Treverton et al., 2012, p. 4) has been inflicting "substantial damage" a century after the Spanish flu. Widespread community quarantine has been imposed to mitigate the devastation, the global economy has contracted, hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost, and millions have been infected. Virus resurgence has prompted "some countries" to "reimpose restrictions" after easing in early May 2020. Faced without vaccines, governments and "health systems" have been racing "to stop" the transmission (Burrows & Engelke, 2020, p. 5-6) and cease the likely "mutation" of the virus. But as the Trump administration has assailed Chinese accountability, which has provoked China's reproach, matters of public concern have been exacerbated by the prospects of "sanctions" (CNA, 2020), "decoupling" (Asia Times, 2020) and "a new Cold war" (Burrows & Engelke, 2020, p. 13). Can the battle on the pandemic and the U.S.-China row kindle ethics to defend the liberty of Assange?

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper hopes to contribute to the preliminary debate on the geopolitical implications of the pandemic crisis unfolding between the U.S. and China using the case of Julian Assange. It is theoretically framed under the imperative of defending matters of public interest that have suppressed Assange's liberty, prayed, and exhorted on In Defense of Julian Assange (Ali & Kunstler, 2019). It is also built on exploratory studies on pandemics as one of the "national security challenges" and "threats to the global commons" (Treverton et al., 2012, p. 1). And it is developed using scenario analyses of U.S. and China tension taken from geopolitical narratives following the outbreak. Particularly, Assange's case of rendering materials available online that have jailed him, the war on coronavirus, and the ensuing U.S.-China row as of May 2020 are the backdrops to kindle ethics for his defense.

“Public” may go beyond the specific groups of people, nationality, boundary, class, and status staked by the war on pandemic and its threat to peace and security compounded by the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China row. Publishing matters of interests framed by Wikileaks exceeds mere “sense-makers” journalists (Coddington, 2014), commitment to “national narrative” (Handley & Rutigliano, 2012) but embraces “data-driven” revelations (Rusch et al., 2013), “democratization” and “digitalization” trends of “media-politics power relations” (McNair, 2012), “fact-checking, verification and protection” of sources (Rosner, 2011). “Freedom of Information” as a constituent to “freedom of expression,” (Heusser, 2010) “information needed for self-governance” and “a more active and engaged citizenry” (Elliott, 2013). Kindling a moral imperative to support Assange against the background of the pandemic and the U.S.-China row is framed from the Aristotelian understanding of ethics as “the inquiry into the human good,” “the chief good,” “something final and self-sufficient,” i.e., “happiness” which means “flourishing or fulfillment” (Aristotle, 2009, p. x). I place such ontology behind Slavoj Zizek’s radical injunction of “absolute [sic] imperative to keep the digital network out of the private capital and state power, and to render it totally accessible to public debate” (Slavoj, 2019, p. 219). I integrally work it with “the new paradigm” of journalism in democracy when the “Internet offers many powerful tools” for information, a shared view the contributors of *In Defense of Julian Assange* vigorously “desire to defend Julian Assange” (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxv).

## **Matters Of Public Interest, War on Covid-19 And**

### **Us-China Tension, and the Security Threat**

How have the matters of public interest framed by Assange led to his persecution, self-exile, and incarceration? How has the war on coronavirus been constructing U.S.-China tension and the ensuing threat to peace and security? Can the war on coronavirus amidst the U.S.-China row kindle ethics in defense of the freedom of Assange?

### **Wikileaks and Assange: Public Interest Matters**

Matters of war published by Western media have been producing the polemics of Julian Assange of Wikileaks. A critical epoch was the war on terror on the ground of 9/11. Liberal media were pictured behind U.S. interventions in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Palestine, and Syria. Mass opposition erupted against the “misleading, half-baked” media narrative but was futile.

Australian-born Julian Assange in 2006 three years after the war in Iraq filled the gap of revelations when Wikileaks published massive corruption in Kenya, “tax evasion” into Cayman Island banks, “malpractice” in the Church of Scientology, “banking fraud in Iceland,” nuclear risks in Iran, and shady deals of U.S.-British contractors in Iraq (Robertson, 2019, p. 80). Wikileaks is unveiling materials that contradict “the standards of justice” and the value of human lives officially asserted by Western democracies (Villa, 2019, p. 159).

The publication that exposes leaked matters of abuses of power embodies the organization’s philosophy as “the way of democracy” (Berardi, 2019, p. 223), upheld by the American constitution’s First Amendment (Wright, 1987, p. 29). Assange focused on “digitalized society” (Burch, 2019, p. 227) by publishing “unredacted files” for “complete transparency,” which he calls serving “a far greater good than leaving decisions . . . to journalists” that likely protect government misdeeds (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxii).

Wikileaks released on April 2010 a disturbing footage leaked from Chelsea Manning showing U.S. soldiers gleefully “machinegun” dead more than a dozen civilians in Iraq on July 12, 2007 (Cockburn, 2019, p. xxix). Dubbed “Collateral Murder,” the clip, also published by other media organizations three years after the incident (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. 58-62), was not “top secret” (Robertson, 2019, p. 87) nor sensitive to protect national security but, as Assange said, only “to protect political security” (Johnstone, 2019, p. 98). It has provoked the horrors of killings of innocents by U.S. armies abroad that might have been unreported (Cockburn, 2019, p. 268).

“[T]he declassified archives that reveal official secrecy,” Noam Chomsky describes, “has little to do with state security” but with hiding group interests from the public (Burch, 2019, p. 227-228). The publication in July

2010 of the U.S. military war logs in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2010 revealed “far higher civilian casualties” than was officially claimed (Robertson, 2019, p. 81). The November 2010 revelation of U.S. diplomatic cables from 1966 and 2010 exposed government corruption worldwide (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxx).

No evidence has ever been presented, which the Pentagon confirmed in 2013, that “a single individual” named, including the U.S. troops, had been “killed” or persecuted as a consequence (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxi; Johnstone, 2019, p. 260). Wikileaks ensures security using an “electronic dead-letter box” where whistleblowers can upload files anonymously throughout (Johnstone, 2019). Assange, on BBC in 2011, said they “encrypt everything” to protect their sources, which is the duty of journalists (60 Minutes Rewind, 2011).

In July 2016, Wikileaks disclosed leaked emails from the Democratic National Committee (DNC), “copied from” files of John Podesta, Hillary’s campaign chair that exposed “millions of dollars of donations from Saudi Arabia and Qatar” to the Clinton Foundation, “the \$657,000 Goldman Sachs paid” for Hillary’s speech, Hillary’s influence on Trump’s nomination, and Hillary’s lead role of “the war in Libya” (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. 6). Assange’s dislike of Hillary has baffled his goal for some, but for many the threat of his life as “a U.S ‘manhunt target list’” following those revelations requires careful evaluation (Lagasneri, 2019, p. 7). The DNC and Podesta emails linked him in the federal investigation as a “Russian” spy, although claims of DNC leak “downloaded to a local device” (Murray, 2019, p. 298) and Podesta emails retrieved from “simple spear-phishing” and not from “hacking” were undermined in the report (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. 298-299).

Revealing what citizens need in democracy, not keeping them secret, defines the being of a journalist (Ferre, 2020, p. 23). Matters Wikileaks accepts are “classified, censored or otherwise restricted material of political, diplomatic, or ethical significance” (Hayase, 2019, p. 239). Giving them to the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, or the White House before publication is “a very questionable practice” of journalism, said the “legendary Pentagon Papers whistleblower” Daniel Ellsberg (Ellsberg, 2019, p. 70). Assange says, “It is our philosophy that raw source material must be made available so that conclusions can be checkable,” a strategy that “allows marginalized perspectives” to dispute claims accepted by society (Hayase, 2019, p. 239).

Assange has defied the structure “that protects the powerful from scrutiny” (Burch, 2019, p. 227) or, in Chomsky’s words, the novel “power strategy” that reinforces “social control” through “manipulating opinion” using digital networks (Burch 2019, p. 227). Assange says, “He who controls the Internet servers controls the intellectual record of mankind, and by controlling that, controls our perception of who we are, and by controlling that, controls what laws and regulations we make in society” (Hayase, 2019, p. 236).

His service earned him Australia’s most prestigious prize “‘The Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism,’ The Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism (UK), the Index on Censorship and the Economist’s New Media Award, and the Amnesty International New Media Award,” as well “nominated for the UN Mandela Prize (2015) and the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize” (The Courage Foundation, 2019, p. 65-66).

However, the organization found itself blocked by major U.S. financial institutions from receiving donations (Robertson, 2019, p. 83). People close to power went on to label Assange as a “hi-tech terrorist” (Gosztola, 2019, p. 28). Then, silencing the journalist-publisher began under a “sexual assault” charge, not “a tax scandal” nor “a drug scandal” as “he does not smoke” and “of modest means” (Avila, 2019, p. 294).

While visiting Sweden in August 2010, two months after the arrest of Manning, Assange had to face an investigation on “sexual assault,” two allegations called “a ploy” to extradite him to the U.S (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxix; Colvin, 2019, p. 287). Following the police investigation, Assange after being granted permission left Sweden for the U.K. In November 2010, Sweden demanded the extradition of Assange but without charge. Assange presented to British police, arrested and spent in solitary confinement, freed on bail on December 14, 2010, and “was put under house arrest” at a Norfolk estate (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxiii).

In May 2012, the Supreme Court ruled to extradite Assange to Sweden, prompting him on June 19, 2012, “to seek asylum in the Ecuadorean embassy” in London (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. 115). Ecuador granted his “political asylum” request in August 2012 (Narvaez, 2019, p. 106). Assange had for the British authorities subjected himself to arrest for bail violation should he leave the embassy. However, bail violation is exercised

only if “without reasonable cause,” hence inapplicable to his right to political asylum (Johnstone, 2019, p. 99). The U.K. government rejected Ecuadorean requests for “laissez-passer for Assange to leave the country” (Burch, 2019, p. 234).

Assange then stayed inside “the 30-square-meter premises of the embassy,” an international organization called “arbitrary detention” (Viana, 2019, p. 334). Smear on him spread. “He’s not a journalist” “He’s a rapist.” “He’s a Russian agent.” “He’s a narcissist/megalomaniac/jerk.” “He put poop on the walls.” “He’s a bad houseguest.” “He only publishes leaks about America.” “He’s a fascist.” “He was a Trump supporter.” “He’s got blood on his hands” (Johnstone, 2019, p. 90-100).

His seven-year “forced exile” (Viana, 2019, p. 334) ended on April 11, 2019, after the newly elected Ecuadorean President withdrew his asylum, a revocation, supporters claimed, has violated “international laws” and conventions (Hedges, 2019, p. 191). Lived on screens, the journalist was arrested, and “dragged out” by British police. An arrest warrant for “bail violation” was served (Johnstone, 2019, p. 99), and another for conspiring with Manning to “crack a password” of a computer of U.S. intelligence (Robertson, 2019, p. 85). Manning, who was granted “clemency” by the Obama administration after serving “seven years” in prison (Hedges, 2019, p. 5; Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxxii), “was re-jailed on March 8, 2019, by the Trump administration” for refusing to testify about her conspiracy against Assange. Manning was released two months later but re-jailed until March 12, 2020.

In May 2019, the 47-year-old was sentenced to “50 weeks” for “jumping bail in 2012” in the “highly restrictive” Belmarsh prison in London (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxxiii), Sweden, dropped its investigation, ending “nearly” a decade his Swedish extradition case. U.S. State Department May 2019 filed 17 more criminal cases for “conspiracy to receive,” “obtaining,” and “disclosure of National Defense Information,” and pressed his extradition. Assange completed his jail terms on September 22, 2019, but was ordered “to remain in prison” for his “absconding.” The final hearing is set for September 2020 after February was postponed because of a pandemic. If the decision is unfavorable, Assange may “appeal” to the U.K. High Court and next to the Supreme Court, where his extradition case “ends” (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xvii-xviii). A British politician once said Assange would face extradition “for exposing” American military abuses abroad (Cockburn, 2019, p. 268).

Assange is charged “to face trial in the East District of Virginia,” USA. John Kiriakou, CIA whistleblower “first person tried in the U.S. for leaking classified materials” during the Obama administration, warned, “No national security defendant has ever won a case in the EDVA” (Johnstone, 2019, p. 98). A “constitutional” issue surfaced “whether as a foreign publisher, [Assange] can claim the protection of the First Amendment.” Jim Goodale, a prominent lawyer for the New York Times’ Pentagon files, asserted that “defending [Assange] will be crucial for press freedom” (Robertson, 2019, p. 86).

Assange’s fate has already established clear deterrence on “leak-publishing journalists” on earth (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xxxvi), persecuting the press, which President Trump reiterates as “the enemy of the people” (Hedges, 2019, p. 7). As anti-war advocate Noam Chomsky says, the arrest shows that the United States could “silence a journalist who was producing materials . . . that people ought to know about the people in power,” a “scandal” Chomsky calls “the shocking extraterritorial reach of the United States . . . [that] goes on all the time, unnoticed, without comment” (Chomsky, 2019, p. 9).

But as Slavoj Zizek says Assange “has no state behind him, just us” (Zizek, 2019, p. 219). Our solidarity requires dismantling the perception that keeps him as a “public enemy” (Kimberly, 2019, p. 44), and “terrorist” (Gosztola, 2019, p. 243). Zizek explains Assange “is not spying on the people for those in power, he is spying on those in power for the people.” Wikileaks hit the nerve of populist and authoritarian leaders (Zizek, 2019, p. 219-220). China, Syria, North Korea, Russia, Thailand, and Zimbabwe took action to shut “all Wikileaks-related websites, threatening to jail any citizens” conspiring against him (Robertson, 2019, p. 81). Defending journalists and media for revealing “uncomfortable truths” means defending crucial “checks” of politics in a democracy (Horvat, 2019, p. 145).



## War on Coronavirus and U.S.-China Row

The war narrative on COVID-19-SARS-Cov-2 has revealed matters of the extraterritorial power of the United States. Pre-COVID-19, the Trump administration has leveled conspiracies on China such as “intellectual property theft,” and Chinese Huawei and ZTE as “national security risk,” which sparked a “trade war. Prospects of Trump’s views on China over COVID-19 and China’s reproach the critical public is facing deserve scholarly attention.

Zizek, in a quotation to Carl Schmitt, said that “[t]he enemy which by definition is always (up to a point) invisible” can be constructed to make it “an appropriate target of hatred and struggle” (Žižek, 2002). Zizek explains such was made possible under the “schematizations” of rogue states, and “only” through the 9/11 terrorist attack such “imagination” has been stabilized in the constructed “image of bin Laden, the Islamic fundamentalist, and al-Qaida.” This pattern is noticeable after the outbreak was declared on January 30, 2020, by the World Health Organization as “a Public Health Emergency of International Concern” (World Health Organization, 2020).

Framing of war on coronavirus resonated across the crisis. U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged, “We must act like any wartime government”; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called his “war against an invisible enemy”; and French President Emmanuel Macron declared, “We are at war.” U.S. President Trump likened COVID-19 to World War II and 9/11 by calling its attack “worse than Pearl Harbor,” the 1941 Imperial Japanese assault, and “worse than the World Trade Center,” the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany is facing the ever “greatest challenge since WWII [sic]” (Telegraph, 2020).

Amidst the crisis, the Trump administration has projected China behind the “invisible enemy” of its “war against the Chinese virus.” Trump has blamed China for failing to arrest the outbreak in Wuhan in December 2019. Beijing categorically denied the accusation, alleging the U.S. was distracting domestic and global response to the crisis. The disease has been infecting 1.2 million and killing over 73,000 Americans as of May 7, 2020. Chinese accountability has been rumored after news of the whistleblower young doctor Li Wenliang, who, after warning his colleagues of a virus he thought SARS-Cov of 2002, on February 7, 2020, succumbed to COVID-19.

Tensions went to the suppression of two proposed international agreements at the United Nations Security Council. In March 2020, China blocked the resolution that declared “COVID-19 a threat to international security,” citing that “‘public health’ matter” is not within the “‘geopolitical’ ambit” of the UNSC. International security concern of health was asserted by UNSC Resolution 1308 in 2000, which called out for an “international response to HIV/AIDS pandemic,” and by Resolution 2177 in 2014, declaring the Ebola outbreak an “international peace and security” threat (Patrick, 2020).

United States blocked a proposed UNSC resolution declaring a “global ceasefire” to advance pandemic countermeasures after China asserted the WHO efforts.(US Blocks UN Resolution on Coronavirus Ceasefire after China Pushes WHO Mention, 2020) Trump, in April 2020, “halted funding to WHO” for “covering up” Chinese mistakes and chunked “expressions of global unity at G7 and G20 meetings” (CNN, 2020).

As Trump’s rhetoric against China flared up, Beijing in March 2020 appeared to achieve quick recovery, citing President Xi Jinping’s trip to Wuhan as reaching “a new stage.” Beijing, with the Jack Ma Foundation, sent “medical aid” to Italy, Spain, France, Greece, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Ukraine, and other countries. Russia jumped “on the China bandwagon” by extending help to Italy. Unlike the previous administration’s leading role in the global coalition against the health crisis of Ebola in 2014, the Trump administration is “failing” in “domestic governance . . . and ability and willingness to muster and coordinate a global response against the crises” (Campbell & Doshi, 2020).

War on coronavirus went to censorship of disputed materials within the social media platforms. Shared videos on “hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 treatment” were “blocked” by Facebook and Twitter, with policy

infringement as a basis. “Plandemic”, a 26-minute conspiracy video, was “removed” from YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook for its “unsubstantiated” claims (The Washington Post, 2020).

Suppression is presumed “to avoid public alarm” (Martini et al., 2019). The United States and other “warring nations” initially silenced news of the flu in 1918 that “killed some 50 million people,” but “neutral” Spain “freely reported” it, hence the “misnomer” “Spanish flu.” WHO called out the “vaccine hesitancy” movement “one of the planet’s top 10 global health threats in 2019.” People are warned against “fables and urban legends” circulated online, like “avoiding ice cream,” “drinking water,” “bleach,” and “cocaine” to fight Covid-19.

Observers say healthcare systems are “less able” to contain the spread (Burrows & Engelke, 2020, p. 11). For South Korea’s “exemplary” response to the crisis, transparent public information and “aggressive measures” despite political “partisan allegiance” helped “slow the spread of the virus” (Rich et al., 2020).

The war on coronavirus amidst U.S.-China tension is a critical public concern that demands serious attention. Bush administration in 2003 “convinced seven in 10 Americans in 2013 that Saddam Hussein of Iraq” had a role in the 9/11 attacks. The revelations of the devastating effects of COVID-19 framed by the Trump administration against China’s reproach has not only downplayed the “worst recession since the Great Depression” but risked the escalation of tension unabated.

### **Threat to Peace and Security**

The “human crisis” in the aftermath of the outbreak prompted the United Nations Secretary-General in early May 2020 to appeal to “treat each other with dignity” and “spread kindness” (CBS News, 2020). “[G]lobal anti-China sentiment is at its highest since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown” (Reuters, 2020).

In China, “angry ads” circulated online in March 2020 promoted outrage about Trump’s “Chinese virus,” also spreading its “USA virus” conspiracy. State-owned media “insinuated” a U.S. army “might have brought the disease” into Wuhan (The Atlantic, 2020).

Analysts warned that “deglobalization is speeding up the mid-2020s [sic],” citing U.S.-China’s “usual blame game” could aggravate “the potential for open conflict between the United States and China-Russia alliance.” Amidst “the slow recovery,” the “bipartisan agreement” to charge China would further damage the Sino-American relations. China-Russia “threats” without “efforts to counter them” also risk “the global fight against diseases, environmental destruction, and state failure” that “brings the United States, the EU, China, and other states together” (Burrows & Engelke, 2020, p. 12-14).

The socio-geopolitical tension also risks “U.S.-China economic” “decoupling,” the “foothills of a Cold War” and “the beginning of a new conventional and nuclear arms race.” U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 and its absence at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit reinforce this prospect. U.S. 2017 National Security Strategy treated China as “a threat” the U.S. “had failed” to contain (The New York Times, 2020).

The threat of “military confrontation” is serious as Trump’s conspiracy for the Chinese Foreign Ministry “infringed [sic] upon China’s sovereignty and dignity” (Reuters, 2020). Revelation that China must prepare for “a worst-case scenario for armed confrontation” with U.S. heightens the risk. U.S. mid-2019 formally “withdrew” from the “Cold War era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty” “with Russia,” putting the world without “an invaluable brake on nuclear war” (BBC, 2019).

Trump administration, on May 12, 2020, inched economic sanctions after Republican senators filed the “COVID-19 Accountability Act” “to authorize the President to impose” heavy sanctions on China unless the latter takes “full” details of the outbreak. Without transparency, the President would impose “asset freezes, travel bans, and visa revocations,” as well as “restricting Chinese” from U.S. finance and markets (NDTV WORLD, 2020).

Chinese Foreign Ministry vows non-submission to the proposed “legislation,” warning of planned “retaliatory sanctions,” condemning U.S. action as “not only irresponsible but immoral.” China defended its “open and transparent attitude” since the outbreak and challenged the Trump administration to stop the “Attack China” reelection campaign, “safeguard” American lives, and participate in the “global anti-pandemic cooperation” (Global Times, 2020).

The threat to peace and security posed by U.S.-China tension is a critical public concern. Trump’s pursuit against pandemic destruction in China can never be divorced from Bush’s pursuit of the 9/11 terrorist attack that led to the “invasion of Iraq in 2003” (Kimberly, 2019, p. 37), inseparable from “America’s extraterritorial reach to capture a journalist (Johnstone, 2019, p. 100), Noam Chomsky as well calls America’s “authoritarian actions” around the world (Channel 4 News, 2016). Thus, U.S.-China dispute has prompted me to invoke an ethics integral to what Žižek particularly calls “eternal Justice” to be “in the sphere of empirical reality” (Žižek, 2002) in defense of the journalist in prison.

### **Ethics In Defense of Assange**

The “health security” threat of outbreaks and pandemics (World Bank, 2017) dubbed in academics as “humanity’s future” (Shaikh, 2020) should have sparked “the study of happiness” for “flourishing or fulfillment” (Aristotle, 2019) in defense of “demonized” journalists behind bars. Pandemics are “an existential threat” without “national borders,” where anyone could indirectly “generate negative effects on the commons” (Treverton et al., 2012, p. xi). But the U.S.-China row poses as well a serious socio-economic-geopolitical concern in the “world post-Covid-19” and beyond. The principle of “global cooperation and multilateralism” (Burrows & Engelke, 2020, p. 3-4) is downplayed, revealing what Žižek calls “perceptible trends” post-9/11 in constructing “the Enemy” “as the ‘quilting point (Lacanian point de capiton),” as an ideological strategy for the cohesion of various social forces (Žižek, 2002).

Matters behind the U.S.-China row require ethics of “vigilance and resistance” to the constitutive “elementary values” Chomsky says despised as “excessive democracy” (Popescu & Chomsky, 2013, p. 217). This imperative constitutes the spirit behind the defining “legal and moral cards” (Narvaez, 2019) in defense of Assange. The “refusal” to trends that quash “international law” by which “relations between states” depend and “the rules of universal human rights” correlate is “an authentic ethical act” (Žižek, 2002).

Priority of transparency from the impartiality of investigation on the still “unknown” details of the outbreak is an utmost moral concern as well pressed forcefully in defense of the innocent “truth teller” who “sparked” public debate of “U.S. government’s secret, illegal, and inhumane policies,” and “brought people into the streets” (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. 354-355). For we cannot afford the same “secrecy and ideology” of “planning disaster” (Curtis, 2019, p. 305) that has destroyed societies in Africa and the Middle East post-9/11 to be at play from the U.S.-China row on COVID-19. Thus, the matters we ought to know since the outbreak and its “ripple effects” from the shifting paradigm of journalism in the digital age embodied in the fate of Assange are rendering the calling for his defense a foremost moral responsibility.

To defend “the spy of and for the people” from U.S. extradition, as Žižek admonishes, is to “fight for him no matter how long it will take,” (Žižek, 2019, p. 220) by “our pressure and mobilization” (Žižek, 2019, 219). This is radical justice “rooted” in human dignity, “in the very nature of “persons as social,” who “ought” “to be accepted, supported, enhanced” even if “we do not have an affection for” (Dy, 2005, p. 25). We defend him to “promote freedom of expression, and defend human rights” from which “Internet is developed” (Burch, 2019), but now gets “militarized” (Assange, 2019). We can kindle this moral responsibility in “the intellectual community,” “the schools, academics, and churches” (Popescu & Chomsky, 2013, p. 214-217), grounded upon the mandate of civil service, of civic duties, and of related institutions to establish policy for truth and order (See Harari, 2016). Ethics that realize the self-correcting mechanism in a democratic society under the rule of law must be kindled, particularly in all legitimate institutions, and that begins in the family as a basic organization of society. Self-sacrifice in pursuit of greater goals for the general welfare as fundamental ethical values must be emphasized (See Harari, 2015; Civil Service Commission, 2017).

Ethics, in his defense, is conduct appropriating Jesus' "Love thy neighbor," evangelized by Paul to mean "no longer Jews or Palestinians" (Žižek, 2002). This spiritual connectivity among us is revealed in our "rational activity," in our "ergon, literally 'task' or 'work'" (Aristotle, 2019, p. x), in the various social privileges we are in, as Žižek warns, means preparing ourselves against "many blows below the belt," against the usual "in the service of Putin" (Žižek, 2019, p. 220). In this vein, our decision process is framed on responsibility to the Other, humanity, i.e., Assange who pleaded in a letter to journalist Gordon Dimmack a day after he was sentenced, I am unbroken, albeit literally surrounded by murderers, but the days when I could read and speak and organize to defend myself, my ideals, and my people are over until I am free! Everyone must take my place.

I am defenseless and am counting on you and others of good character to save my life... Truth, ultimately, is all we have (Ali & Kunstler, 2019, p. xi).

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