

Craig Murray

Former Ambassador, Human Rights Activist

- [Home](#)
- [About Craig Murray](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Documents](#)
- [Invite Craig to Speak](#)

« [Circuses, but Less Bread](#)

America's Vassal Acts Decisively and Illegally

by craig on August 16, 2012 11:30 am in [Uncategorized](#)

I returned to the UK today to be astonished by private confirmation from within the FCO that the UK government has indeed decided - after immense pressure from the Obama administration - to enter the Ecuadorean Embassy and seize Julian Assange.

This will be, beyond any argument, a blatant breach of the Vienna Convention of 1961, to which the UK is one of the original parties and which encodes the centuries - arguably millennia - of practice which have enabled diplomatic relations to function. The Vienna Convention is the most subscribed single international treaty in the world.

The provisions of the [Vienna Convention](#) on the status of diplomatic premises are expressed in deliberately absolute terms. There is no modification or qualification elsewhere in the treaty.

Article 22

- 1.The premises of the mission shall be inviolable. The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of the mission.
- 2.The receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity.
- 3.The premises of the mission, their furnishings and other property thereon and the means of transport of the mission shall be immune from search, requisition, attachment or execution.

Not even the Chinese government tried to enter the US Embassy to arrest the Chinese dissident [Chen Guangchen](#). Even during the decades of the Cold War, defectors or dissidents were never seized from each other's embassies. *Murder in Samarkand* relates in detail my attempts in the British Embassy to help Uzbek dissidents. This terrible breach of international law will result in British Embassies being subject to raids and harassment worldwide.

The government's calculation is that, unlike Ecuador, Britain is a strong enough power to deter such intrusions. This is yet another symptom of the "might is right" principle in international relations, in the era of the neo-conservative abandonment of the idea of the rule of international law.

The British Government bases its argument on domestic British legislation. But the domestic legislation of a country cannot counter its obligations in international law, unless it chooses to withdraw from them. If the government does not wish to follow the obligations imposed on it by the Vienna Convention, it has the right to resile from it - which would leave British diplomats with no protection worldwide.

I hope to have more information soon on the threats used by the US administration. William Hague had been supporting the move against the concerted advice of his own officials; Ken Clarke has been opposing the move against the advice of his. I gather the decision to act has been taken in Number 10.

There appears to have been no input of any kind from the Liberal Democrats. That opens a wider question - there appears to be no "liberal" impact now in any question of coalition policy. It is amazing how government salaries and privileges and ministerial limousines are worth far more than any belief to these people. I cannot now conceive how I was a member of that party for over thirty years, deluded into a genuine belief that they had principles.

21 Comments



1.

Tom Welsh

16 Aug, 2012 - 11:50 am

Ah but Craig, just as the US government stands above all forms of international law (and morality and decency), so its duly constituted vassals are also empowered to ignore any laws they don't happen to like.

And so... Britain will become a pariah state.



2.

Tom Welsh

16 Aug, 2012 - 11:51 am

“William Hague had been supporting the move against the concerted advice of his own officials; Ken Clarke has been opposing the move against the advice of his”.

Any sane PM would realise that this, in itself, means the course that Hague supports is wrong.



3.

glenn

16 Aug, 2012 - 11:55 am

UK diplomatic staff abroad must be thrilled to hear about this. After all, if such behaviour is acceptable enough for the British, nobody can complain if weak governments in far more volatile countries do the same.

Likewise when it comes to torture, detention without trial, even extra-judicial state killings for that matter - we do it, so anyone else can refer to our shining example of how things are supposed to be done.

It also shows how much pressure the US is obviously putting on us, and makes it absolutely obvious what would happen five minutes after the Swedes got hold of Assange.



4.

Richard Nolan

16 Aug, 2012 - 12:01 pm

A truly sad state of affairs and confirmation that there really isn't any political choice left in this country. Lots of noise on Twitter so hopefully the Ecuadorian Embassy will be inundated with protesters and our man will be able to make his escape, but I think the writing's on the wall.



5.

[Kevin](#)

16 Aug, 2012 - 12:09 pm

Pressure from the Obama administration, huh? Why has no one in the White House press corps questioned him on this issue lately? When is the US president's next press conference?



6.

doug scorgie

16 Aug, 2012 - 12:28 pm

Apparently the UK secretary of state can remove the diplomatic status of any embassy if it is considered to be misusing its premises. This came about after the 1984 Libyan shooting.

If the government considers that protecting Assange from arrest is a misuse of their embassy premises, they can remove inviolability status and argue that they can enter and arrest Assange. That's how they will justify their actions.



7.

[craig](#)

16 Aug, 2012 - 12:33 pm

Doug,

That's the domestic legislation. But nothing in the Vienna Convention authorises that, and of course any country can follow suit against our Embassies abroad.



8.

Piers

16 Aug, 2012 - 12:42 pm

The US is above any law, even their own these days. So we must obey their instructions to capture julian so they can execute him for their 1st amendment violation!!! Ridiculous!!

Embarrassing situation, why can't we and many other countries just say NO! And suffer their consequences, they cannot punish every country without isolating themselves.



9.

David Mills

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:07 pm

I actually view the possibility that the suggested action by the UK is being considered as at the least unwise and at the worst dangerous. As for legality, I leave that to lawyers.

However, am I the only person to question the contradiction here? Assange is accused of crimes of a sexual nature in a sovereign country. He and his supporters have bleated about his other activities (which are of questionable probity in my opinion) and a different sovereign country appears to have offered him asylum as a result.

In his header the author claims that he is a Human Rights Activist. The tone of this article suggests that he is a supporter of Assange whose human rights, on any evidence I have seen, do not appear to be under immediate threat. However, his accusers' rights are, if things go the way that Assange and his flock wish, to be denied.

On another tack. I would like to see proof that any pressure has been brought by the US administration on the British government. Likewise I would like to see the proof that the Swedish Administration would extradite Assange to the USA. Why hasn't the UK administration done so?



10.

AlexT

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:08 pm

Call me naive but I can't believe this is really happening. What is the piece of domestic legislation this would be based on ?



11.

Jon

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:16 pm

We're getting a lot of traffic at the moment, so if you want to promote this post (say on Twitter) then it's been reposted here too:

<http://indymedia.org.uk/en/2012/08/499040.html>



12.

[Richard](#)

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:21 pm

It would be nice if they actually read their own laws. The Act they're referring to actually specifically says that it's only legal if it's legal under international law.

There seem to be two reasons in the Act - one is for planning law, for instance if the building is in the way of a new road or railway line and the sending country is being awkward, they can remove diplomatic status, CPO the building and then allow the country to establish a new embassy elsewhere. I could see that being used for Crossrail, for example.

The other is if the embassy is being used for purposes that are neither part of the mission nor consular. Granting asylum is specifically part of the mission of an embassy, so the law just doesn't do what they want it to do.



13.

glenn

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:25 pm

Kevin: There is no chance any of the Whitehouse elite press corps will ask questions as awkward as that. Not if they want to keep their extremely well paid jobs, because then they'd never get "access" ever again.



14.

Bill

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:28 pm

Being pessimistic, it doesn't matter that this domestic law doesn't actually allow them to do this — they'll do it anyway, and then afterwards the courts will tell them they were wrong, there'll be some slaps on the wrists and apologies, but Assange will already be hanging.



15.

nevermind

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:34 pm

On the day the media's focus was about to shine a light on to A. Coulson's criminal acts whilst Cameron's press secretary, the opportunity arises to lick spittle to Obama, whilst diverting the eyes of the public on to Julian Assange and Ecuador's diplomatic plight, how convenient. I fear that the moment Ecuador's ambassador announces that they will grant him asylum, the police will attack their diplomatic inviolable status and arrest him. Who knows he might not go to Sweden at all, knowing Rove, he has the paperwork sewn up, making the extradition one way.

What news management, anything to stop Cameron being connected to Andy Coulson or any of the other skeletons rattling in his wardrobe. Obama must be assured of his presidency after Romney's last visit to Israel, why else speculate attacking Iran before the election.

Don't forget Nov. elections for PPC's, clearly a post that should not be inhabited by party politicians. If any job scream independence its this one.



16.

Jon

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:34 pm

Out of interest, after posting this article on Indymedia, the following appeared as a comment within 10 minutes (!), defending the possible decision to invade the embassy. That someone sympathetic to the Establishment position just happened to be on Indymedia (an anarchist/protest site) is very odd indeed. Furthermore, the comment appears now to have been deleted (probably by Indymedia staff - I don't think ordinary users can delete comments). This is a copy:

Surprised Craig didn't know this (16.08.2012 12:11)

Considering what Craig did in the past I am surprised at some of the things he has said here.

"This will be, beyond any argument, a blatant breach of the Vienna Convention of 1961"

No it will not - the Convention allows for exactly these circumstances under section V, sub section 3 where an individual from a country may

be arrested in another countries embassy if a serious offence has taken place. The only individuals protected under the Convention are consular officials. There are many precedents for arrests of these kinds:

- March 1953 - French police arrest bank robber who was hiding in Mexican embassy
- August 1974 - Columbian police arrest drug dealer in German embassy
- December 1976 - US police arrest child murderer in Australian embassy
- October 1984 - British police arrest Algerian terrorist in French embassy.

-
- I have other examples
- Ian Sharp - lawyer

Any legal eagles here who could take a view on this opinion?



17.

Terry Groves

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:37 pm

I would as a British citizen be horrified to see such an action to take place, I don't believe for one moment that they would implement such a plan, this would destroy all the beliefs of freedom and fair play I hold for this country....



18.

[craig](#)

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:41 pm

Jon,

What is even stranger is that the Vienna Convention doesn't have sections, and there is nothing like the reference given by "Ian Sharp" in the text. My link above gives the full text on the UN site. Pretty strange disinformation technique.



19.

nuid

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:46 pm

IF they storm the Ecuadorian embassy to grab Assange, they'll accuse Ecuador of "harbouring a terrorist". Joe Biden and others have already labelled him a "cyber-terrorist". And with pushing from the USA, the UK will take that line, and to hell with international OR domestic law.

·
Sky News cut off the Ecuadorian minister's press conference and went to ads, on the basis that "he was taking too long to get to the point". F them.

·
Craig's article was re-tweeted lavishly on Twitter and this site went down. Probably because too many people were seeking to access it at the same time. I doubt if it was anything more sinister.

·
Apparently also the UK has told Ecuador that "it might still revoke the diplomatic status of Quito's embassy in London to allow the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder."

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/08/16/wikileaks-assange-britain-idINL6E8JG5PY20120816>



20.

[Philip](#)

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:46 pm

The liberal impact on Government policy is, of course, the same as Reverend Blair's impact on American policy, namely that things would have been even worse without it. Whatever may happen to British diplomats, be they hindered, harassed, kidnapped or strung up by the thumbs, no doubt Nick Clegg will be there to remind us that respect is a two-way street, and that much greater evils would have occurred had international law been allowed to prevail in its fiendish course.



21.

Paul Murphy

16 Aug, 2012 - 1:47 pm

Thank you so much, Craig... and also those who have commented... for publishing such a clear and informative account of just why storming the Ecuadorian embassy to arrest and remove Julian Assange would be such a terrible, terrible mistake.

I am shocked that a democratically elected British government would ever even contemplate, let alone plan and carry out, such an action. If Assange's arrest and removal goes ahead, it will put at risk the life of every diplomat (along with every embassy staff member...) in every embassy, consulate and mission in the world... as well as massively damaging the long and noble tradition of one nation being able to speak and hear the truth directly -and fearlessly - to and from any other.

Leave a Reply

Name(Required)

Email(Required)(Will not be published)

Website

Twitter

Submit Comment

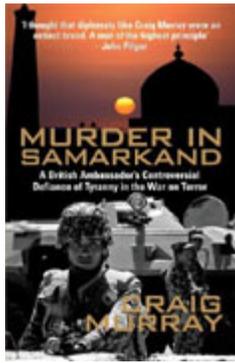
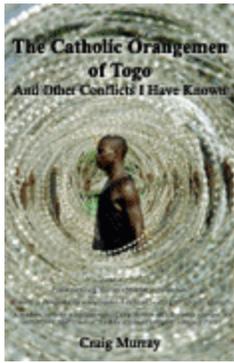
Comments will be closed on August 23, 2012.

« [Circuses, but Less Bread](#)



Search this site

Books



Archive

Select Month ▼

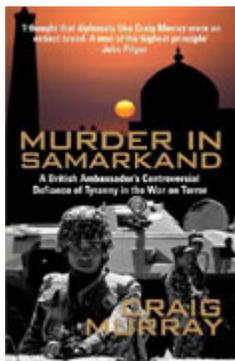
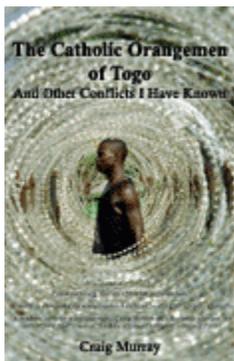
Categories

Select Category ▼

Blogroll

- [Bloggerheads](#)
- [Chicken Yoghurt](#)
- [Glenn Greenwald](#)
- [Juan Cole](#)
- [Lenin's Tomb](#)
- [Obsolete](#)
- [Subrosa Blonde](#)

Books



Recent Posts

- [America's Vassal Acts Decisively and Illegally](#)
- [Circuses, but Less Bread](#)

- [Torture in the 21st Century](#)
- [Plus Ça Change](#)
- [Obama Worse Than Bush \(again\)](#)
- [Child Alert](#)
- [Flying Blue Air France Con Trick](#)
- [President John Atta Mills](#)
- [Massacre in Uzbekistan](#)
- [2nd Test Selection Exclusive](#)

Powered By [Wordpress](#) | Designed By [Ridgey](#) | Produced by [Tim Ireland](#) | Hosted by [Expathos](#)