

Julian Assange's heart-it-leaks catalyst for determining his destiny

✘ Julian Assange, the 43 year old Australian activist, who became famous for his WikiLeaks 'project', has announced that he is suffering from heart problems. He must, therefore, leave the diplomatic cocoon, where he has been living since June 2012. Julian Assange started publishing his revelations through a website known to very few, WikiLeaks, in 2007. His name exploded on the world scene in November 2010 when he published the contents of more than 250,000 secret US diplomatic cables. The revelations came as a shock to diplomatic relations, even those between allies, even if his website became a symbol of information transparency. Almost overnight, Assange became a hero to many and a scourge to a select few in positions of power. Washington was furious. More than his medical problems, Assange has been plagued with legal ones.

The Stockholm District Court issued an arrest warrant on charges of sexual assault; curiously, these charges came just as the world learned of the 250,000 diplomatic cables when two Swedish women, supposedly, issued a complaint, citing abuse. Assange, who has denied the charges, was handed over to the British authorities on December 7, 2012. Sweden, issued an extradition request in 2011, which the British courts accepted 2011 and which Assange's Australian lawyers promptly appealed. Between appeals and extradition requests, Assange ran a program for the Russian international news network 'Russia Today' (RT News – Russia's version of 'al-Jazeera'). He ran the show from house arrest. One of the highlights was his interview of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Meanwhile, his appeal against extradition was dismissed, whereupon he was invited to accept status of political refugee at the Embassy

of Ecuador in London. Assange was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, though his popularity started to fade in 2013. He even ran for political office in Australia but obtained only 1% of the votes. And now, Assange's heart has decided for him, calling the founder of WikiLeaks to face his destiny. London police has been waiting for him in front of the Ecuadorian embassy doors since two years ago. He also faces extradition to the United States.

There is no certainty that Assange is ready to leave the Ecuadorian embassy since he has often stated that he wants the US extradition possibility to be totally nullified. Indeed, he may have a case. Last November the US Justice Department said that the US would not be able to prosecute Assange for his WikiLeaks revelations without bringing into question all the major media outlets from the 'New York Times' to CNN or 'The Guardian', because they helped to publicize Assange's revelations. The US would need technical and specific charges, possibly related to the direct hacking of Government computer. Technically, therefore, Assange only faces the sexual abuse charges Sweden. The rumors over Assange's health and his possible decision to face the authorities start to appear as an effort to get Assange and Wikileaks into the news again and raise the question as to Wikileaks's impact.

Wikileaks has mostly generated debate leading the path for similar phenomena such as the NSA scandal, shedding light on the major imbalances in the world stage, not only from the political perspective but also from the economic ones, or the 'markets'. One of the most noteworthy ones also helps to explain Washington's growing concerns with national security and reducing dependency on foreign powers for critical materials – namely rare earths. Indeed, one of the most significant Wikileaks revelations concerned the Chinese government's orders and requests for public procurement at the expense of foreign companies. China has banned Microsoft's Windows 8 operating system from government offices accusing

the Software Company of having collaborated with the American government. Interestingly, Wikileaks showed that many governments are skeptical of software manufacturers including Symantec and Kaspersky antivirus vendors and extending to IBM, Google and Apple. Leaked cables suggested that governments, from Germany to Brazil, have expressed mistrust toward some 'developers' and their ability to protect privacy. Nevertheless, Assange and Wikileaks's main effect has been to highlight the fact that, despite the widespread sensation that Internet granted all citizens with a connection the power and freedom of information, publishers are still vulnerable and critical information is still withheld and that therefore our belief in freedom of information remains an illusion.

Assange has not really affected national security as his detractors have claimed; his threat has been in the sense that citizens have become far more prone to question what is meant by democracy and freedom. It has generated more political apathy and disregard for authority. The secondary effect of Assange's actions has been to demonstrate to what extent governments will engage in investigations and efforts to damage and, potentially, to silence journalists inside and outside their borders. Ultimately, Assange has made us all a little more cynical.