



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

20 December 2010 | Draft

Mirroring Global Moral Equivalence

US contra Julian Assange versus China contra Liu Xiaobo

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Commentary

A curious feature of the separate discussion of *WikiLeaks and the First Global Condom War: political awakening through asymmetric psychodrama: US versus Assange* (2010), is the strange dramatic mirroring between:

- **the official reaction of China** to the award of the [2010 Nobel Peace Prize](#) to the imprisoned dissident [Liu Xiaobo](#). This might be understood as having been presented in the well-reasoned case by the founder of the [Euro-China Forum](#), David Gosset (*No winners in Nobel saga*, *China Daily*, 10 December 2010). China has clearly been incensed by the incident, seen to have been motivated by US (Tania Branigan, *'Prejudice and lies will not stand' says Beijing, still furious over Liu Xiaobo's Nobel peace prize*, *The Guardian*, 10 December 2010). The state-owned media calls the Nobel Committee an "evil cult".
- **the official reaction of US** relating to the information dissident [Julian Assange](#), founder of [WikiLeaks](#), and his imprisonment by the UK in that same week (*Wikileaks founder Julian Assange refused bail*, *BBC News*, 8 December 2010). This contrasts with the official position of US regarding Liu Xiaobo, as articulated by Barack Obama: *The values he espouses are universal, his struggle is peaceful, and he should be released as soon as possible*. The official . This was rendered even more surreal by the simultaneous release on bail by the UK authorities of a prominent individual accused of murder (*South Africa death husband Shrien Dewani granted bail*, *BBC News*, 10 December 2010). It is unclear whether this case was also handled by the UK Serious Organised Crime Agency. It is now alleged that Shrien Dewani had also been associated with an earlier murder. Days later Assange was also granted bail for an amount only slightly less than that of Dewani, but with the same restrictive conditions (*Wikileaks founder Julian Assange granted bail*, *BBC News*, 14 December 2010). This was immediately challenged by an appeal from Swedish prosecutors.

The Chinese government now plans to award its own peace prize -- the Confucius Peace Prize (*China's Peace Prize To Counter Nobel For Dissident*, *NPR*, 8 December 2010). The drama would achieve a new twist if the first such award had been made to Julian Assange -- before his assassination by US, or even posthumously. It is of course the case that the US has been vigorously articulate in associating itself with arguments for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy in the case of Liu Xiaobo.

However commentators have noted that the leaders of totalitarian countries can now legitimately claim that they can emulate the US if -- prior to any charges or warrant -- the US considers itself free to terminate the WikiLeaks' domain name, their hosting provider, even denying citizens the ability to register protest through donations, and all targeting overseas entities. The US would seem to be showing its true face by projecting its problematic facets onto others. However the arguments long made by US, that no question of [moral equivalence](#) could be considered, are now brought radically into question. The argument had been notably developed by a US Ambassador to the UN, [Jeane Kirkpatrick](#) (*The Myth of Moral Equivalence*, 1986).

Other commentators have noted the extent to which China's reaction has weakened its own position (Will Hutton, *China's fury over the Nobel showed weakness, not strength*, *The Guardian*, 12 December 2010). However in arguing that China's propaganda campaign against the Nobel committee is symptomatic of its fears for the regime, it is totally appropriate to argue that the propaganda of US against Assange is indicative of the nature of the fears of the most powerful country in the world.

Reaction of Chinese Government to award of Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo (for his dedication to human rights)	Reaction of US to Julian Assange as founder of WikiLeaks (for enabling freedom of information)
According to a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement: <i>The Nobel Peace Prize is meant to award individuals who promote international harmony and friendship, peace and disarmament. Liu Xiaobo is a criminal who has been sentenced by Chinese judicial departments for violating Chinese law. Awarding the Peace Prize to Liu runs completely counter to the principle of the award and is also a desecration of the Peace Prize.</i>	The US, in collaboration with Unesco, announced on 7 December 2010 its hosting of the World Press Freedom Day (Washington, DC, May 2011): <i>The theme for next year's commemoration will be 21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers. The United States places technology and innovation at the forefront of its diplomatic and</i>

<p>According to the China Daily: <i>Imagining a paralyzed Chinese society, the committee's logic envelops two invalid arguments. From a perceived unjust but particular dispute it infers a general arbitrary regime, and, presupposing without nuance that the only alternative to the Western liberal democracy - which can never generate injustice! - must be a totalitarian regime, they simultaneously categorize and judge the world's most populous country. The committee has convinced itself that Liu is, within a static and Manichean representation, the symbol of the radical opposition between the good and evil, while his personal situation only illustrates the contradictions and vicissitudes of China's modernization....</i></p>	<p>development efforts. New media has empowered citizens around the world to report on their circumstances, express opinions on world events, and exchange information in environments sometimes hostile to such exercises of individuals' right to freedom of expression. At the same time, we are concerned about the determination of some governments to censor and silence individuals, and to restrict the free flow of information. We mark events such as World Press Freedom Day in the context of our enduring commitment to support and expand press freedom and the free flow of information in this digital age.</p>
<p>All news about the announcement of the award was immediately censored in China at the time of the announcement though later that day became available. Foreign news broadcasters including CNN and the BBC were immediately blocked after mentioning the award in China. Following government attempts to block Internet and SMS usages of Liu's name</p>	<p>It is unclear to what degree all news regarding WikiLeaks was in some way censored in the news media in the US. A distinction needs to be made between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the news focus on WikiLeaks, the release of the documents, on Assange's responsibilities in that matter, or the accusations against him by Sweden. • the unsuspected discreditable practices revealed by the content of the embassy cables <p>Whilst the first category is extensively covered, as evidenced by CNN, it is unclear that the second has been covered or censored. This will presumably be determined in the future. The fact that <i>The New York Times</i> has been warned "informally" of its coverage and the possibility of criminal action, is indicative of the pressures on other media to report on the second category.</p> <p>Sarah Seltzer reports the indication by <i>Time Magazine</i>, regarding its choice of <i>Person of the Year 2010</i>, that its readers gave Julian Assange an easy first place (<i>Assange Won Readers' Poll, But TIME Chooses Zuckerberg for Person of the Year, AlterNet</i>, 15 December 2010; Barton Gellman, <i>Julian Assange: Runder up</i>). An "editorial decision" as a result "informal pressure"?</p> <p>Missy Ryan (<i>U.S. Air Force blocks NYT, Guardian over WikiLeaks, Reuters</i>, 14 December 2010); <i>State Department Bars Employees From Reading Wikileaks on 'Personal Time'</i> (2010)</p>
<p>China pressured many countries not to send diplomatic representatives to the Peace Prize award -- some 20 countries, readily labelled as "client states" indicated they would not attend (<i>China presses nations to steer clear of Nobel award ceremony, Deutsche-Welle</i>, 10 December 2010). It is assumed that those who did send representatives will be penalized thereafter in their relations with China.</p>	<p>Government officials have been formally warned regarding downloading the embassy cables. Cases are cited of universities being informally warned of facilitating student access to the content. Presumably this is also true of state funded libraries. However a spokesman claimed that no guidelines had been issued to private citizens on how to deal with the documents.</p>
<p>There is a long cultural tradition, from the origins of imperial China, requiring that those of inferior rank <i>kowtow</i> to those of higher authority.</p>	<p>"Informal" warnings have been given to a series of supposedly global corporations (Amazon, Master Card, Visa, PayPal, etc) who have considered it "wise" to terminate activities enabling WikiLeaks to act or Assange to defend himself against charges yet to be brought. Those pressures have been extended to equivalent institutions in the client states of US.</p>



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