

By Nikolas Kozloff

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On a certain level, I wonder whether Baltasar Garzón, the Spanish judge who is now defending WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, agreed to take the assignment for personal reasons.

In recent years, Garzón has come to international attention for pursuing a number of high profile international cases. In 1998 for example, the judge sought to apprehend brutal Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, Washington's ally during the Cold War. Not stopping there, the pugnacious judge issued an order for British authorities to detain Henry Kissinger no less.

But what really seems to have raised the ire of the U.S. was Garzón's attempt to indict six former Bush officials for crimes against humanity, including Bush Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, John Yoo (Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel), Douglas Feith (Undersecretary of Defense for Policy), William Hayne (Donald Rumsfeld's Chief Counsel), Jay Bybee (Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel), and David Addington (Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff).

The Bush 6 constituted a legal team which authorized torture at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba and elsewhere. One might think, on the surface at least, that the incoming Obama administration would want to bring these figures to justice. However, WikiLeaks cables reveal to the contrary that Obama officials pressured to have Garzón removed from the Bush 6 case, which was ultimately dismissed.

If that was not bad enough, cables also reveal that the U.S. pressured the Spanish government to have Garzón drop his investigation into the death of a Spanish journalist who was killed by American shelling in Baghdad. Moreover, Garzón was obliged to abandon efforts to get to the bottom of allegations made by Spanish Guantánamo detainees that they had been tortured. The intrepid Garzón had also sought to investigate the use of Spanish bases for CIA "rendition" flights, which resulted in suspects being transported to third countries which practiced torture. Once again, according to WikiLeaks cables, Garzón was obliged to cease and desist from his important legal work.

Perhaps, as a result of these WikiLeaks disclosures, Garzón feels a certain degree of personal solidarity with Julian Assange. Having irked the powers that be in Washington once before, the Spanish judge is now entering the public spotlight once again.