

Further US demands for espionage charges against Assange

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While Obama administration spokesmen and the Australian government continue to insist that Washington is “not interested” in prosecuting WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence head, Dianne Feinstein, has issued another call for the Australian citizen to be put on trial.

“Mr Assange should be prosecuted under the Espionage Act [of 1917],” Feinstein told the Melbourne-based *Age* last week. “I believe Mr Assange has knowingly obtained and disseminated classified information which could cause injury to the United States. He has caused serious harm to US national security, and he should be prosecuted accordingly.”

US Justice Department spokesman Dean Boyd told the newspaper that “there continues to be an investigation into the WikiLeaks matter.”

Assange is currently inside Ecuador’s embassy in London, pending a response to his June 19 application for political asylum in that country. Ecuadorian embassies in the US and Britain reported last week that they had received over 10,000 email messages in support of his application.

Assange’s decision to seek asylum followed the recent UK Supreme Court rejection of his legal appeals against extradition to Sweden. The WikiLeaks editor fears that if removed to Sweden, Washington will intervene and extradite him to the US. There he would face trial, on trumped-up charges, for the “crime” of publishing hundreds of thousands documents exposing war crimes by Washington, and the intrigues of the major powers.

The latest statements from Feinstein and the US Department of Justice, along with other evidence of grand jury moves against WikiLeaks and its personnel, confirm Assange’s warnings. The Senate committee that Feinstein heads oversees the leading US intelligence agencies, including the CIA, National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Assange could also be charged with aiding and abetting the alleged treason of US Army Private Bradley Manning. Manning was arrested in May 2010 in Iraq, on suspicion of passing classified material to WikiLeaks. He has been charged with violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Espionage Act. The most serious charge is aiding Al Qaeda, which is a capital offence.

British police last week delivered an official letter to the Ecuadorian embassy ordering the WikiLeaks editor to immediately report to a local police station. A Scotland Yard spokesman claimed that it was “standard practice in extradition cases and the first step in the removal process... Failing to surrender would be a further breach of [Assange’s bail] conditions and he is liable to arrest.”

Assange’s lawyers responded by stating that political asylum assessments, under both international and British law, take priority over extradition claims.

Mainstream media outlets continue to falsely claim that the WikiLeaks editor has been charged with sexual assault in Sweden and ignore the unprecedented refusal of Swedish prosecutor Marianne Ny to interview Assange in the UK or via video link. Only a handful of

newspapers have explained the oppressive conditions that Assange would face if extradited to Sweden.

In a comment published by the *Guardian* newspaper on July 2, Per Samuelson, Assange's Swedish lawyer, explained that his client would not receive a fair trial in that country. On arrival, the WikiLeaks editor would be immediately imprisoned, possibly in isolation, he said, and held for the entire pre-trial investigation into the so-called sexual assault allegations. Assange would not be able to apply for political asylum in any other country.

"Assange has not even been charged with any crime," Samuelson stated. "And the situation makes it difficult for him to prepare his defence. If a defendant is placed in isolation, they are allowed contact only with their defence lawyer. The prosecutor and complainants, however, can confer at length with witnesses and work out their strategies."

Samuelson pointed out that Sweden had been widely condemned for its "overuse of detention and isolation" of remand prisoners. "The UN committee against torture in 2008 strongly criticised conditions in Sweden's remand prisons, and Swedish courts, for the fact that prison restrictions, such as isolation, are imposed on 42 percent of detained suspects," he said.

"Even if Assange is not held in isolation, conditions in Swedish remand prison make it impossible for a suspect to have proper contact with the outside world: there are not enough landline telephones, mobile phones are banned, letters are often censored, and to meet people you have to fill in application forms that can take weeks to process."

Both before and since his arrest in Britain in late 2010, Assange offered to be questioned by the Swedish prosecutor via telephone, video conference, or in person. He has continued to repeat this offer from the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Bildt and prosecutor Ny claim that it is illegal under Swedish law to question Assange in another country, but have refused to provide legal argument to substantiate this claim.

The ongoing US vendetta against Assange, Manning and WikiLeaks is part of a far broader international assault on free speech and democratic rights under the banner of the "war on terror." Governments around the world are desperate to prevent ordinary people understanding the underlying economic and political motives behind the diplomatic conspiracies and intrigues.



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