

UK threatens to storm Ecuadorean embassy to seize Assange

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17 August 2012

The threat by the UK's Conservative-Liberal Democrat government to storm the Ecuadorean embassy to arrest WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange shows contempt for international law and a colonialist-disregard for Ecuadorean sovereignty.

It marks a new stage in the British ruling class' descent into criminality, aiming to silence a man who has helped expose many of its innumerable crimes and those of the United States and other imperialist powers.

Thursday saw the much-anticipated announcement by Ecuador that it will grant political asylum to Assange, based upon the probability that his extradition to Sweden would be followed by his transfer to the United States and a trial for treason. A government spokesman said that Ecuador had sought assurances from Sweden that Assange would not be transferred to the US, but the Swedish authorities had refused to give them.

The case against Assange is a transparent politically motivated frame-up, utilising trumped-up accusations of sexual assault in Sweden. Ecuador offered to allow Swedish prosecutors the opportunity to question Assange at the embassy, in person or via videoconference. But this was rejected.

On Wednesday night, police officers began to gather around the embassy in anticipation of the expected announcement by Ecuador. Assange entered the embassy on June 19, requesting diplomatic sanctuary and political asylum under the United Nations Human Rights Declaration. This followed the ruling by the UK's Supreme Court rejecting Assange's final appeal against his extradition to Sweden.

In a letter to the Ecuadorean government, the British government stated that the embassy would be given a week's notice of a raid by the police, should it grant asylum. On Thursday morning, police vans were stationed along roads next to the building. A number of

those protesting to demand Assange's freedom were forcibly moved from in front of the embassy to a pen set up across the road. Arrests of protesters were made, including one who was filming a live feed for the Occupy News Network.

Demonstrators chanted "Hands off Assange", "Hands off Ecuador", and "There's only one decision—No extradition".

On Wednesday Ecuador Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño announced in a news conference the receipt of the letter from the UK government, via the British Embassy.

"Ecuador rejects in the most emphatic terms the explicit threat of the British official communication," he said, denouncing the threat as "improper of a democratic, civilised and law-abiding country."

"If the measure announced in the British official communication is enacted, it will be interpreted by Ecuador as an unacceptable, unfriendly and hostile act and as an attempt against our sovereignty," he warned. "It would force us to respond. We are not a British colony."

The letter from the UK Foreign Office was couched in language befitting Britain's role as an imperialist aggressor. Claiming the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act 1987 provides for actions to be taken "in order to arrest Mr Assange in the current premises of the embassy," it continued: "We need to reiterate that we consider the continued use of the diplomatic premises in this way incompatible with the Vienna convention and unsustainable and we have made clear the serious implications that this has for our diplomatic relations."

On Thursday, a UK government spokesman issued a statement saying a decision by Ecuador's government to grant Assange the right to political asylum would be

disregarded. “Giving asylum doesn’t fundamentally change anything,” the spokesman said.

The hypocrisy and cynicism of the British government in its claim that Ecuador is acting in breach of the Vienna convention knows no bounds.

It is they who are overturning fundamental precepts of international law, including the Vienna Convention, in an attempt to railroad Assange to trial. International law specifically defines foreign embassies as sovereign space, and such diplomatic posts are considered the territory of the foreign nation.

Commenting on the dire consequences of the threat to seize Assange, Geoffrey Robertson, an internationally recognized human rights lawyer who has represented Assange, said: “It’s very clear from the Vienna Convention and indeed from our own Diplomatic Privileges Act from 1964 that the diplomatic premises and consular premises are what we call inviolable.

“And the local police can only enter them with the consent of the head of the mission.”

The British government cited the Diplomatic & Consular Premises Act of 1987 as providing the basis for withdrawing recognition of the Ecuadorean embassy. However, the Act is specific in stating, “The Secretary of State shall only give or withdraw consent or withdraw acceptance if he is satisfied that to do so is permissible under international law.”

Were the British police to be sent into the embassy without consent to arrest Assange, this would be a clear violation of international law, specifically Article 22 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Opposing Ecuador’s request to allow Assange the freedom to leave Britain, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague declared bluntly: “We will not allow Mr. Assange safe passage out of the United Kingdom, nor is there any legal basis for us to do so. The United Kingdom does not recognise the principle of diplomatic asylum.”

In a statement, Assange thanked the Ecuadorean government for granting the right to asylum, adding, “While today is a historic victory, our struggles have just begun. The unprecedented US investigation against WikiLeaks must be stopped.

“While today much of the focus will be on the decision of the Ecuadorean government, it is just as important that we remember Bradley Manning [the US soldier accused of leaking information to WikiLeaks]

has been detained without trial for over 800 days.

“The task of protecting WikiLeaks, its staff, its supporters and its alleged sources continues.”

The descent of British diplomacy into threats and police thuggery against another sovereign nation is of a piece with the naked criminality being defended. The ruling class and its political representatives, including the former Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, have over the last decade planned and waged illegal wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are now supporting the US-coordinated covert war against Syria, aimed at replacing the government of Bashar al-Assad and paving the way for war with Iran.

The targeting of Assange is also being conducted in collusion with the Obama administration in the United States, Britain’s partner in crime.



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