

UK pressured Sweden not to question Julian Assange in London

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According to emails published by the Italian newspaper *L'Espresso*, the UK put pressure on Swedish prosecutors not to question WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in London and to continue demanding his extradition.

In 2010, Sweden issued a European Arrest Warrant for Assange's arrest based on politically motivated allegations of sexual misconduct.

He was granted political asylum after taking refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in June 2012 and has been confined there ever since.

He dare not leave the embassy for fear of immediate arrest by police, extradition to Sweden and ultimately the United States. There, he would be hauled before a secret grand jury on unspecified espionage charges relating to the publication of classified documents by WikiLeaks exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and State Department conspiracies around the world.

The *L'Espresso* emails, obtained under a Freedom of Information request, show that the British government was determined to prevent Assange being questioned in London, which would allow him the opportunity to challenge the accusations. Assange has always denied the accusations, for which he has never been charged.

In one email sent in January 2011, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) lawyer, Paul Close, told Swedish prosecutor, Marianne Ny, "in my view it would not be prudent" for Assange to be questioned in the UK.

"Even if the defendant was to consent to such an interview on a mutually agreed basis, the defence would without any doubt seek to turn the event to its advantage", Close continues.

"It would inevitably allege it was conclusive proof that the Swedish authorities had no case whatsoever against him, and hence the interview was in the hope he would make a full and frank confession. ... Thus I suggest you interview him only on his surrender to Sweden and in accordance with Swedish law."

In another email, Close made it clear to Ny, "Please do not think that the case is being dealt with just as another extradition request."

Assange's lawyers say the new revelations are a "significant development", showing "an apparent example of a prosecutor giving another prosecutor advice in order to diminish the rights of the defendant."

"The official explanation was that the quality of the interrogation would be too poor. ... We never believed in that, and consistently questioned it. Now we suspect ... the true reason was they were afraid to interrogate Assange was because it would give him a platform to defend himself."

Following the revelations, lawyers are considering a new appeal against the arrest warrant and whether to call for Ny to be replaced.

The CPS tried to deflect criticism, saying that the emails were sent in 2011 before Assange was granted asylum and claiming, "We were following due process and advice was being given to facilitate that request. We could not have anticipated later developments, and in particular that Mr Assange would fail to surrender when the courts ordered his extradition to Sweden."

Asked the meaning of Close's words that the Assange case was not "just another extradition case", the CPS said some cases "stand out because of the nature of the offence, the identity of the requested person, or the complexity of the case, for example. These cases may require greater resources in terms of time and expertise."

Nearly five years after Assange was arrested in London, Ny has still not taken a statement from Assange about the allegations—a fundamental requirement in Swedish law to determine whether someone should be formally charged.

Assange has been quite willing to be interviewed, provided it took place in the UK and not in Sweden. It is routine practice for European Union (EU) prosecutors to question people in another EU state. Since the arrest

warrant was issued in 2010, the Swedish authorities have interviewed 44 other people in the UK. Swedish lawyers point out that judges and officials from a whole Stockholm court went to Rwanda for several weeks in 2012 to take witness statements relating to the 1994 genocide.

Last year, the Swedish Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court ruled that Ny had breached her professional duty for failing to resolve the Assange case. In March, seven months later, Ny agreed to travel to London following a letter from the Supreme Court to the prosecutor general, requesting an opinion concerning an appeal Assange's lawyer had launched, "especially regarding the investigatory procedure and the principle of proportionality." The general-secretary of Sweden's Bar Association, Anne Ramberg, declared, "It should have been taken long before."

In May, the Swedish Supreme Court used the fact that Assange was about to be questioned in London as one reason why it saw "no reason to lift the arrest warrant."

However, in June, the appointment was cancelled at the last minute. Assange said, "Prosecutor Ny led my lawyers to believe that the appointment was proceeding. My lawyers had booked tickets and I have been put to considerable expense. Today, I learned that the Swedish legal application to Ecuador, which is likely to take weeks, was only sent to Ecuador two days ago."

Swedish Prosecution Authority spokesperson, Fredrik Berg, said that the appointment had been cancelled due to the delayed documents, adding, "We will do everything to ensure the interrogation happens in June or July."

It did not take place. Instead, in August, investigations into three of the four allegations against Assange were suspended because a five-year statute of limitations had expired. A remaining rape allegation remains and can be pursued until 2020.

Last week the Metropolitan Police Service announced that it was withdrawing its 24-hour police presence around the Ecuadorean embassy, claiming it was "no longer proportionate". However, a "covert plan" has been "strengthened" to replace the "dedicated guards."

The passing of five years has not dampened the ruling elite's vindictive hatred of the WikiLeaks editor for his role in exposing US war crimes and criminal diplomatic intrigues.

This week it was revealed that the UK refused an Ecuadoran request in August for Assange to be given "safe passage" for a few hours out of its London embassy to a hospital for a medical examination under conditions

mutually agreed by the two governments.

Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño told a press conference in the Ecuadorean capital Quito that even at the height of war, safe passage is given for humanitarian reasons for people needing medical attention.

He read out a letter from Assange's UK doctor, which said that Assange "has been suffering with a constant pain to the right shoulder region for the past three months. There is no history of acute injury to the area. ... I examined him and all movements of his shoulder (abduction, internal rotation and external rotation) are limited due to pain. I am unable to elicit the exact cause of his symptoms without the benefit of further diagnostic tests, [including] MRI."

Patiño said, "The reply we have had from Britain is that he can leave whenever he likes for any medical care he might need but the European Arrest Warrant for Assange is still valid. In other words, he can leave—and we will put him in jail."

It is only necessary to recall that General Augusto Pinochet was indicted in October 1998 on charges from Spain of committing appalling human rights violations in his native Chile, including 94 counts of torture.

After a year and a half, during which all efforts by the Labour government in the UK to legally thwart extradition demands had failed, Home Secretary Jack Straw ruled that extradition should be rejected on grounds of poor health. But then Pinochet was responsible for the murder of thousands of left-wing political opponents, while Assange is an opponent of the Pentagon and the CIA, which helped place the Chilean dictator in power.



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