

Julian Assange “in jeopardy” of being forced into UK and US detention

Mike Head
25 May 2018

According to a CNN report today, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is in imminent danger of being forced to leave the Ecuadorian embassy in London. He would face arrest by British authorities and potential extradition to the US, where he could face life imprisonment or execution on espionage charges.

CNN said that “multiple sources with knowledge” of Assange’s “unusually bad” situation warned that he could be removed from the embassy “any day now”—either forced out or made to feel so restricted that he might leave on his own.

Since seeking political asylum in the embassy in 2012, Assange has been effectively detained in a tiny room without charge for 2,726 days. For 59 days, he has been denied visitors and outside communications since the Ecuadorian government cut off his access on March 28.

Assange is now only allowed to see his lawyers, who say their mobile phones are jammed while they are inside the embassy.

Ominously, CNN said Assange’s exit from the embassy “could open a new phase for US investigators eager to find out what he knows.” This indicates that Assange could be subject to forced interrogation or prolonged solitary confinement, like Chelsea Manning, in an attempt to break him.

“The concern from day one until the present is that if Julian Assange walks out of the embassy, he will be extradited to face what the executive director of the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] described as ‘unprecedented and unconstitutional’ prosecution under the US Espionage Act,” one of Assange’s lawyers, Melinda Taylor, told CNN.

Section 794 of that Act, covering supplying information to a wartime enemy, carries the death penalty. Last year, CIA director Mike Pompeo, now the

US secretary of state, labelled WikiLeaks as a “hostile non-state intelligence service.” Pompeo declared: “To give them the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. It ends now.”

Taylor told CNN: “For the last eight years, the UK has refused to either confirm or deny that they have received an extradition request from the US. At the same time, they have refused to provide assurances that Julian will not be extradited to the US if such a request were to be received, and maintained an ever-present vigil of the embassy, notwithstanding a UN directive to take steps to ensure Julian’s immediate liberty.

“Their silence speaks volumes, particularly in light of recent statements from US officials that Julian’s arrest and extradition are a priority.”

In April 2017, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions said arresting Assange was a “priority.” He told a news conference: “We’ve already begun to step up our efforts and whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail.”

For nearly eight years, US officials have maintained a secret grand jury investigation into WikiLeaks, instigated under the Obama administration.

US authorities have stepped up their efforts to silence Assange because of WikiLeaks’ ongoing publication of documents that expose the criminal operations of its military and intelligence agencies, including a trove of source codes and files revealing details about CIA hacking tools.

The WikiLeaks founder now also faces criminal charges relating to unsubstantiated US intelligence claims that Russia used him as an intermediary to distribute supposedly hacked emails from Hillary Clinton’s campaign during the 2016 presidential election.

Last month, the US Democratic National Committee (DNC) launched a law suit, naming WikiLeaks and Assange as co-conspirators with Russia and the Trump campaign in a supposed criminal effort to steal the 2016 US presidential election.

What actually alarmed the DNC and others in the US political and intelligence establishment was that the documents published by WikiLeaks laid bare the DNC's intrigues to undermine Bernie Sanders' campaign in the 2016 presidential primary elections, and Clinton's intimate relations with Wall Street banks and companies.

Ecuador's president, Lenín Moreno, who took office last May, is under mounting US pressure to expel Assange. In January, Moreno branded Assange a costly "inherited problem" and "hacker," and made it clear that he viewed Assange as an obstacle to better relations with Washington.

Moreno's government cut off Assange's communications just a day after it welcomed a delegation from the US Southern Command, headed by General Joseph DiSalvo, to discuss strengthening "security cooperation."

Ecuador's government granted Assange asylum six years ago after his legal appeals ran out against extradition to Sweden, supposedly to answer questions over fabricated allegations of sexual assault. Swedish authorities finally dropped their trumped-up investigation last May, terminating the European arrest warrant against him.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Theresa May's British government, a close US ally, refused to cancel a UK arrest warrant against him, nominally for skipping bail when he sought asylum.

The US State Department has refused to deny a bid to extradite Assange. One official told CNN: "As a matter of policy, the Department of State neither confirms nor denies the US government's intention to request extraditions."

Last week, the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, which originally published some of WikiLeaks' devastating exposures in 2010, instigated a filthy campaign to justify Ecuador reneging on Assange's asylum.

While claiming, without any evidence, that Assange had violated the embassy's communications security systems, the *Guardian* disclosed that the Ecuadorian

authorities had monitored all of Assange's visitors, one of whom the FBI had already interviewed.

This points to close collaboration between the Ecuadorian and US intelligence agencies, as well as the complicity of the *Guardian* and other corporate media outlets.

Guardian opinion writer James Ball declared that Assange "should hold his hands up and leave the embassy." The *Guardian's* lead article set out the intended scenario: "If he walks out of the embassy, he can expect arrest and could spend up to a year in prison for breaking his bail conditions. The US might then seek to extradite him. He would contest any attempt, and might win, but would face a long, uncomfortable spell behind bars while his case is decided."

None of this would be possible but for the collaboration of successive Australian governments, starting with that of Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard. She branded Assange a criminal in December 2010 and pledged to assist the US operation to seize the Australian citizen.

The threat to Assange is not an individual issue. It is part of an intensifying campaign by the US government and its partners to impose far-reaching Internet censorship in order to block the development of mass working class opposition to deepening inequality, austerity and war preparations.

Unsubstantiated allegations of "fake news" are being used by Google, Facebook and other social media giants to restrict access to websites—particularly the *World Socialist Web Site*—that expose the machinations of the capitalist class and its agencies and provide an alternative political perspective.

Despite the intensifying government and media conspiracy, there is deep public support for Assange internationally, precisely because of the damning exposures made by WikiLeaks. We call on workers and young people everywhere to urgently come to Assange's defence and demand his immediate freedom.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact