

WikiLeaks exposes spying operation against Assange in Ecuador's London embassy

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At a press conference in London yesterday, WikiLeaks detailed a vast and illegal surveillance operation against its founder, Julian Assange, inside Ecuador's British embassy, where he was granted asylum in 2012.

The material presented by the publisher's editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson and Assange's lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, demonstrated that every aspect of the WikiLeaks founder's life over more than a year, including medical consultations and private legal meetings, had been spied upon by Ecuadorian officials inside the embassy.

The revelations are another damning exposure of the collaboration of the Ecuadorian regime of President Lenín Moreno with the British and American authorities, aimed at illegally terminating Assange's political asylum. They follow WikiLeaks' warning last Friday that a high-level source within the Ecuadorian state had informed it that Assange would be expelled from the embassy "within hours or days."

Opening the press conference, Hrafnsson said that the surveillance "entails a total violation" of Assange's privacy. It covered "everything on the life of Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy," and demonstrated that since Moreno came to power in 2017, the WikiLeaks founder had been living in a "*Truman Show* like situation."

He explained that WikiLeaks became aware of the extent of the spying "several weeks ago," when it learnt that a group of individuals in Spain was "passing around" material gathered within the embassy. Hrafnsson corresponded with the group and met with them in Spain "around 10 days ago."

The individuals, who allegedly include a Spanish national previously implicated in extortion, demanded that WikiLeaks provide three million euros for hundreds of thousands of documents, audio recordings, videos and photos taken in the embassy. They showed Hrafnsson samples of the material, which he recorded with a hidden camera and showed at the press conference.

The group is being pursued by an investigative magistrate in Madrid, after WikiLeaks assisted Spanish police carry out a sting operation. It is not known how they came into

possession of the material.

Among the documents held by the group was a confidential legal note from Assange's Spanish lawyer on a case last year challenging Ecuador's imposition of a "protocol" gagging Assange.

Hrafnsson stated that the only conceivable way in which the document had been disclosed, was that it had been stolen by officials in the Ecuadorian embassy, when it was briefly left unattended, and copied.

The Spanish group also had video and audio recordings of Assange's legal meetings, including those relating to cases against Ecuador, and of his medical examinations. They had the passport details of all of Assange's visitors and videos from the embassy lobby.

Hrafnsson stated that the vast surveillance within the embassy had been "all for one purpose," which was to "serve US government interests who want to indict and imprison" Assange, "a publisher, for the crime of publishing truthful material."

He noted that the Trump administration had requested visitor logs from the embassy earlier this year, and that the Moreno regime had allowed the US Department of Justice to interrogate Ecuadorian officials and diplomats about Assange. Hrafnsson said that it was likely that all of the material gathered in the embassy had been turned over to US authorities.

Robinson explained that Ecuador's spying involved a "severe breach of lawyer client privilege," which had "fundamentally undermined" the ability of WikiLeaks' lawyers to defend Assange. WikiLeaks, she said, would be renewing an application to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to intervene in defence of Assange, and submitting a new complaint to the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on privacy. The special rapporteurs on torture, and on privacy, are both set to meet with Assange on April 25.

Fidel Navaez, who served as Ecuador's consul to Britain until mid-last year, warned that Assange's situation was "more precarious than ever."

“One thing is absolutely clear,” he said, “with a new government, Ecuador is not protecting Julian anymore... Quite the contrary, the government is making everything possible to end the asylum. The only reason why it hasn’t happened yet, in my opinion, is because of the international shame, the historic shame, that will go to Ecuador if it does so.”

Navaez condemned the Moreno regime’s shutting-off of Assange’s internet access and communications in March 2018, and the imposition of severe restrictions on his asylum. He declared that political asylum was “not a contract between two parties,” but an inviolable “human right” and “international institution.”

The former Ecuadorian diplomat said that the surveillance operation would have been authorised by the highest levels of the Moreno regime. He noted that last year, a new set of security cameras were installed in the building, equipped with audio recording capabilities.

The press conference itself demonstrated the shameful role of the corporate media in the persecution of Assange, a journalist and publisher. In response to the grave material presented, virtually all of the reporters asked hostile questions aimed at maligning the WikiLeaks founder and downplaying the threats that he faces.

One journalist asked whether, in light of the Trump administration’s pursuit of Assange, WikiLeaks regretted “having helped Trump get elected by publishing material from Russia.”

In reality, WikiLeaks published leaked documents in 2016 that revealed that the Democratic National Committee sought to rig the party’s primaries against Senator Bernie Sanders on behalf of war-monger and big business operative Hillary Clinton. It also published secret speeches delivered by Clinton to Wall Street banks, in which she pledged to do their bidding.

Hrafnsson responded by declaring that it was a “duty” of journalists to publish material that was truthful, newsworthy and in the public interest, and that he hoped the gathered representatives of the press would agree with this elementary proposition.

It is an indictment of the role of the corporate media, as a servile arm of the state, that one unidentified journalist shouted that he did not. He pathetically stated that there were unspecified “laws” which “we as professional journalists sometimes choose to comply with,” by suppressing true and newsworthy information.

The Ecuadorian surveillance operation confirms that Assange is the target of an unprecedented international political conspiracy centred in the United States.

The immense resources being expended in pursuit of Assange by US and British imperialism, and their lackeys,

including the Moreno regime, demonstrate the lengths to which they will go to prevent principled reporters and publishing organisations from revealing the truth.

Amid the reemergence of the class struggle, governments around the world are censoring the internet, targeting left-wing and anti-war websites and persecuting journalists and whistleblowers, in preparation for the suppression of mass opposition to war, austerity and dictatorship

The flagrantly illegal spying also underlines the fact that the major powers do not have any case against Assange that would withstand judicial scrutiny, in Britain, the US or under international law. They are desperately seeking to cobble together a case through dirty tricks operations and political repression.

That is why for the past four weeks, the Trump administration has held Chelsea Manning, who leaked the US army’s Iraq and Afghan war logs and hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks in 2010, in solitary confinement. Her only “crime” has been to refuse to give perjured testimony to a Grand Jury aimed at concocting charges against Assange.

Significantly, Hrafnsson and Robinson stated that in their opinion, the reason Assange had not been expelled from the Ecuadorian embassy since Friday was that the conspiracy to terminate his asylum had been leaked and publicised. Navaez declared that Assange’s fate depended upon “international solidarity.”

The immense support for the WikiLeaks founder among millions of workers and young people, who rightly view him as a heroic figure, must be developed into a mass political movement fighting for his freedom.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world call for the broadest expression of opposition to the persecution of Assange and Manning, including through the organisation of campaigns at university campuses and in working-class suburbs, meetings, protests and rallies.



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