

Sweden reopens “preliminary investigation” and seeks extradition of Julian Assange

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Sweden’s reopening of an investigation into a long-discredited rape allegation made against Julian Assange in 2010 deepens the US-led conspiracy to discredit and silence the WikiLeaks founder.

Sweden’s deputy director of public prosecutions, Eva-Marie Persson, announced at a press conference Monday that the “preliminary inquiry” into the allegations against Assange would be reopened and a European Arrest Warrant issued to the UK for Assange’s extradition.

The decision, she claimed, was made because, “After reviewing the preliminary investigation carried out so far, I find that there still exist grounds for Julian Assange to be suspected on probable cause of the charge of rape.”

Everything about the latest move is based on lies, including the pretence that Persson has acted out of concern for Assange’s accuser.

No new evidence is cited by Persson, and the “preliminary investigation” over the previous seven years failed to produce a shred of credible evidence. Assange has, moreover, already been questioned twice by Swedish prosecutors and further questioning will add nothing to what is known.

The only conclusion to be drawn from the failure to bring charges is that Sweden’s legal authorities long ago decided there was no evidence on which a prosecution could be mounted. Persson gave tacit acknowledgment to this in her statement yesterday, in which she said, “I would like to make the following very clear: my decision to re-open the preliminary investigation is not equivalent on whether or not to file an indictment with the courts. This is the matter we’ll have to revisit.”

Elisabeth Massi Fritz, the lawyer representing the woman accusing Assange of rape, told a separate press conference that prosecutors would be “forced to take steps quickly to ensure that we have time to get a *potential criminal charge* in this case.” [emphasis added]

None of this stopped the BBC and other news sources

from referring to “the charges” against Assange, as part of the media’s ongoing disinformation campaign.

WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson said of Sweden’s decision, “Since Julian Assange was arrested on 11 April 2019 there has been considerable political pressure on Sweden to reopen their investigation, but there has always been political pressure surrounding this case.

“This case has been mishandled throughout. After the Swedish prosecutor refused to question Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy for years, it was only when forced by Swedish courts that she travelled to London to finally question Assange.

“Then Sweden wanted to drop its arrest warrant for Assange as early as 2013. It was the British government that insisted that the case against him continue. Since the investigation was closed in 2017, we have received reports of the destruction of records and correspondence on behalf of UK and Swedish authorities, surely an impediment to a thorough investigation.”

He concluded with a defiant statement:

“Assange was always willing to answer any questions from the Swedish authorities and repeatedly offered to do so, over six years. The widespread media assertion that Assange ‘evaded’ Swedish questioning is false. This investigation has been dropped before and its reopening will give Julian a chance to clear his name.”

Answering the lie that Assange “hid” in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid Swedish “justice,” Assange’s legal team have noted:

- The initial Swedish preliminary investigation in 2010 was dropped after the chief prosecutor of Stockholm concluded regarding the consensual sexual encounters with the two women that “the evidence did not disclose any evidence of rape” and that “no crime at all” had been committed.

- Assange stayed in Sweden for five weeks and only left

Sweden after the prosecutor told him that he was free to do so, as he was not wanted for questioning.

- The reopening of the “provisional investigation” in September 2010 took place after WikiLeaks published the Iraq “Collateral Murder” video in April and the Afghanistan war logs in July. US grand jury proceedings had already begun against Assange in June, with officials telling the *Daily Beast* that the State Department was “pressing Britain, Germany, Australia, and other allied Western governments to consider opening criminal investigations of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange...”

- Assange sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in 2012 to avoid being extradited to the US from Sweden because Stockholm refused to provide assurances that it would not do so.

- After years of refusing to question Assange at the embassy, Sweden’s director of public prosecutions, Marianne Ny, was forced to relent in 2016. The Court of Appeal ruled that she had breached her duty, because a preliminary investigation must either be open and active leading to a charge, or closed.

- Ny must have concluded that there was no basis for charging Assange when she closed the investigation in May 2017. There was no technical impediment preventing her from filing charges.

Britain’s Home Secretary Sajid Javid must now eventually decide whether to prioritise Sweden’s claim, or the extradition warrant issued by the US. The US warrant is framed over charges of a conspiracy to commit computer intrusion, based on the claim that Assange gave technical advice to whistleblower Chelsea Manning, and could result in a prison term of up to five years.

However, this charge is only being levelled so that Washington can claim Assange will not face decades in prison or the death penalty under the Espionage Act. This creates major political and legal difficulties for the UK, which would be obviated by sending Assange to Sweden based on its prior claim, and “rape” being the more serious offence than that officially cited by the US.

Assange is now ensnared in a horrifying extra-legal process in which his fundamental legal and democratic rights are being destroyed. He has spent seven years arbitrarily detained under terrible conditions in the Ecuadorian Embassy. He is now serving a 50-week sentence in Belmarsh maximum-security prison in near-total isolation. A legal battle in Sweden would extend his incarceration still further, before Sweden might then provide a backdoor for Assange to be extradited to the US and still more brutal treatment.

The main political advantage for UK Prime Minister Theresa May’s government in prioritising the Swedish warrant is that it would guarantee the support of the Labour Party for Assange’s extradition.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn now bears direct political responsibility for the fate of the WikiLeaks founder.

Within days of Assange being snatched from the Ecuadorian embassy on April 11, more than 100 MPs, mostly right-wing Labourites, signed a cross-party letter to Javid and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, demanding they “champion action that will ensure that Julian Assange can be extradited to Sweden.”

The letter was sent after Abbott and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn broke years of silence to make a pro-forma statement opposing Assange’s extradition to the US.

After they were attacked by the Blairites for doing so, both immediately fell in line, with Corbyn telling ITV News that if the Swedish case was “reinstated, then obviously he must answer those questions and those demands about the accusations made against him by people in Sweden.”

Labour, under Corbyn’s leadership, has formulated an alternative plan to silence Assange on behalf of British and US imperialism. If it is implemented, then Corbyn will be praised to the skies—not only by the Blairites but by Britain’s main pseudo-left groups, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, which have insisted, “Assange should face trial in Sweden if the woman who made the complaint continues with it.”

Underscoring the monstrous criminality of Assange’s treatment, Spain’s *El Pais* reported that Ecuador is to hand over all of his documents, cellphones, digital files, computers, memory drives and CDs to the US and allow a search of his room in its embassy on May 20.

Baltasar Garzón, Assange’s lawyer, denounced “an absolute violation of the institution of asylum by Ecuador ... It is incomprehensible that the country that afforded him protection is now taking advantage of its privileged position to turn over his belongings to the country that is persecuting him. These belongings will be seized without a court warrant, without protecting the rights of political refugees, without respecting the chain of custody.”



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