

UK home secretary signs US extradition request for Julian Assange

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British Home Secretary Sajid Javid boasted on Thursday that he certified a US extradition request for Julian Assange on Wednesday, just a day after the Trump administration formally asked the British government to extradite the WikiLeaks founder and journalist.

In a radio interview, Javid paid lip service to the need for the British courts to first approve the extradition, while still making plain the British establishment's determination to hand Assange over to his persecutors in Washington.

"First of all I am very pleased the police were able to apprehend him and now he is rightly behind bars because he broke UK law," Javid told BBC Radio 4 on Thursday. "There is an extradition request from the US that is before the courts tomorrow but yesterday I signed the extradition order ...

"It is a decision ultimately for the courts, but there is a very important part of it for the home secretary and I want to see justice done at all times and we've got a legitimate extradition request, so I've signed it."

These comments were made on the very eve of Friday's scheduled initial hearing of Assange's case before a London magistrates' court. By directly connecting Assange's arrest on April 11, and immediate jailing, to the extradition process, Javid only underscored the conspiracy by the US, British and Australian governments against Assange, an Australian citizen.

Assange was dragged from his political asylum in Ecuador's London embassy by British police on April 11, using the fig leaf of minor bail-skipping charges. Within hours of his arrest, US prosecutors said they had charged him with conspiracy in trying to access a classified US government computer.

Just as Assange, and the WSWS, had warned since

2010, the US government last month added 17 new counts, including charges under the Espionage Act for encouraging, receiving and publishing classified information, allegedly in concert with the courageous whistleblower, former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning. This is a frontal assault on journalists and press freedom.

These charges relate to WikiLeaks' 2010 publication of hundreds of thousands of classified documents on US and allied military war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, torture and human rights abuses inside the US Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba, and US-led diplomatic intrigues, mass surveillance and regime-change operations around the world.

As soon as Assange was arrested, the British government, from Prime Minister Theresa May on down, celebrated and hailed the police operation. Javid himself immediately took to twitter to falsely claim it was about showing that "no one is above the law."

The exact opposite is the truth. Both the British and US governments are trampling over fundamental legal and democratic rights, including the right to political asylum, freedom of the press, and due process. Incarcerated in London's notorious Belmarsh Prison, not only has Assange's health seriously deteriorated, but, as his father John Shipton stated this week, he has been denied any capacity to prepare his legal challenge to the extradition.

The British government is doing everything it can to assist and expedite the US extradition, defying a report by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer. As well as documenting doctors' findings that Assange is being subjected to psychological torture, Melzer has sent a detailed report to the UK, US, Sweden and Australia outlining his concerns about Assange's future.

“My most urgent concern is that, in the United States, Mr. Assange would be exposed to a real risk of serious violations of his human rights, including his freedom of expression, his right to a fair trial and the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,” Melzer said in a statement about his report, which has yet to be publicly released.

In the US, just as great a travesty of justice is continuing. Chelsea Manning is being held indefinitely, without charge, in a bid to force her to give perjured testimony against Assange before a grand jury. And WikiLeaks warned last week that the US is also seeking to revive an attempt by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to frame Assange for “computer hacking” in Iceland in 2011.

The barbaric treatment of Assange, quickly followed by last week’s unprecedented police raids on journalists in Australia, has alarmed millions of people internationally and prompted journalists and media workers in many countries to speak out. After years of silence, journalists are recognising that the attacks on Assange have opened the floodgates for a global offensive against press freedom.

The German Journalists Association (DJV) this week called on the British authorities to release Assange. “The WikiLeaks founder is accused of something that should not be a criminal offence: accessory to treason by means of publishing,” it said. German journalists union (DJU) Chairperson Tina Grudge warned of “a massive intervention in the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the press” should Assange be extradited to the US. It would act “as a deterrent to potential whistleblowers,” with “serious consequences for the work of the media.”

Just as much as the Trump administration, the British government is determined to see Assange locked away for life, despite growing opposition from workers, students, young people and civil liberties advocates.

The silencing of WikiLeaks, and the intimidation of all whistleblowers and media outlets, is bound up entirely with the preparations for even greater war crimes and anti-democratic abuses. Backed by its allies, notably Britain and Australia, the US is intensifying its aggression against China, Iran, Venezuela and Syria as part of Washington’s drive to restore the global hegemony it achieved through World War II.

Assange is due to appear by video link from

Belmarsh Prison at an extradition hearing on Friday, provided his health permits. If the rapid jailing of Assange on the bail charges, without any proper hearing, is any guide, the judges will seek to speed the extradition process.

Assange’s lawyers are expected to argue that his extradition should not take place because he would not face a fair trial in the US and because the charges are for “political” crimes.

Legally, Assange has a right to appeal any ruling by the magistrates’ court, and this could delay the extradition for some months. Once the judicial procedures are completed, however, Javid, or whoever becomes the next British home secretary, has the power to quickly rubberstamp the extradition.

At that final stage, the home secretary is meant to certify that Assange will not face the death penalty—yet can accept an assurance to that effect from the US secretary of state—and that Assange will be charged only with the offences for which he is being extradited. However, there are exceptions, and once Assange is in US custody any such assurances will be worthless.

Supporters of WikiLeaks and democratic rights are holding rallies internationally this week against the US extradition process and to demand freedom for Assange and Manning. On Friday from 9 a.m., a demonstration is being held in London outside Westminster Magistrates’ Court where Assange’s hearing is scheduled.

In Australia, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is holding a further round of rallies in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The SEP demands that the Australian government fulfil its obligations to Assange as a citizen by using its legal and diplomatic powers to secure his immediate return to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the US. We urge all our readers to join the global fight being led by the Socialist Equality Parties and the WSWs.



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