

US seeks to block Spanish investigation into CIA operation against Assange as British ruling on extradition appeal is “imminent”

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Over the past 24 hours, WikiLeaks has reported that a British High Court ruling on a US appeal aimed at securing Julian Assange’s extradition is “imminent.” Several other legal sources have also stated that the decision is to be brought down in early December.

The US appeal was directed against a January District Court judgement, which blocked Assange’s dispatch to his American persecutors. That narrow verdict endorsed the authoritarian argument that states have a right to prosecute publishers of “national security” material, but rejected extradition on the grounds that it would be “oppressive,” given Assange’s acute medical issues and the draconian conditions in which he would be detained in the US.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser accepted that there would be a “high risk” of Assange committing suicide, if he were extradited.

The US appeal, heard in late October, centred on callous attempts to undermine expert medical testimony about Assange’s health issues, and bogus assertions that the conditions of his imprisonment would not be as bad as claimed by the defence. The US “assurances” themselves stated that Assange could be placed under “Special Administrative Measures” at any point during his detention, a regime of total isolation likened to “living death” by human rights organisations.

At the appeal hearings, the defence spotlighted a recently-published *Yahoo News* report, which documented plans by the Trump administration and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to kidnap Assange or assassinate him when he was a political refugee in Ecuador’s London embassy in 2017.

Based on the anonymous statements of more than thirty former US officials, the article made clear the murderous plans were hatched in retaliation for Assange’s exposure of mass CIA spying and hacking operations. Officials explained that the US Justice Department cobbled together its indictment of Assange, over separate WikiLeaks publications, so that there would be a pseudo-legal cover if the CIA proceeded with its kidnap plan.

As Mark Summers, QC told the appeals hearing, “This is the first time, of which we are aware, that the US has sought the assistance of a UK court in obtaining jurisdiction over someone where the evidence suggests it has contemplated, if not plotted, the assassination, kidnap, rendering, poisoning of that person.”

The gross illegality of the US pursuit of Assange has not

previously stopped the British judiciary from facilitating his persecution at every step. And whatever the upcoming ruling decides will be the subject of further appeals, underscoring the crucial importance of developing a movement of the working class for Assange’s immediate freedom.

While the US authorities have aggressively used willing British courts to further their vendetta against Assange, they have adopted a very different attitude to other legal proceedings relating to the WikiLeaks founder.

In a follow-up article late last month, Michael Isikoff, the chief investigative correspondent at *Yahoo News* reported that “The Justice Department has failed to respond to multiple requests from Spanish authorities for help in an investigation into a local security firm suspected of being used by the CIA to conduct aggressive—and potentially illegal—surveillance of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.”

The firm involved is UC Global, which held the Ecuadorian government contract for managing security at its London embassy. Whistleblowers from the company have alleged that in 2016, its CEO David Morales entered into a secret agreement with emissaries of the CIA to transform the embassy into a hub of spying and dirty tricks against Assange. Morales was arrested and later released on bail in late 2019, and is the subject of Spanish judicial proceedings involving three sets of alleged victims of his activities: Assange, WikiLeaks staff and German reporters who collaborated with them, and former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa.

Extensive evidence in the public domain has demonstrated that UC Global recorded every aspect of Assange’s life, including privileged meetings with his lawyers, before turning over the material to the CIA. The firm was allegedly involved in break-ins and other attacks on Assange’s lawyers, including in Spain. And the whistleblowers have asserted that there were discussions about facilitating a kidnapping or poisoning of the WikiLeaks founder, in cahoots with American intelligence.

Isikoff reported: “Since June of last year, Spanish judges have sent three requests for information to the Justice Department primarily seeking information about the ownership of IP addresses believed to be in the United States that had access to files documenting Assange’s activities while he was holed up in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, according to copies of the

requests reviewed by *Yahoo News*.”

All of those requests had been ignored by the Justice Department, despite an agreement between Spain and the US for mutual assistance in criminal investigations. Justice Department officials, however, have sought to prise information from the Spanish judiciary about the case. Previous reports have indicated this included a sinister and extraordinary demand for the identities of the UC Global whistleblowers.

“I am not so pleased about it,” Santiago Pedraz, the investigating judge told *Yahoo* about the US stonewalling, adding: “They have absolutely not answered anything.”

There is no innocent explanation for the US response, which combines intense interest in the proceedings and the material held by the judiciary, with an attempt to prevent the investigation from establishing the truth. The Justice Department’s actions can only be interpreted as a tacit admission that Morales and UC Global were functioning as a CIA cut-out.

That the Justice Department is covering for the CIA is significant. Prosecution lawyers for the US extradition have previously suggested that even if there had been a spying operation against Assange, it had nothing to do with the Justice Department and the proceedings for extradition. They have touted supposed Chinese walls between different branches of the US government. But in the Spanish case, the Justice Department is protecting CIA surveillance of Assange, at the same time as it seeks his extradition from Britain.

The latest *Yahoo* revelations coincide with another explosive report, indicating that sections of the corporate press were aware of, and complicit in, the spying operation as it was underway.

An article in *MintPress*, by John McEvoy and Pablo Navarrete, published correspondence between *Guardian* journalist Stephanie Kirchgaessner and a “source” within UC Global, between July and November, 2018.

In September 2018, Kirchgaessner published a story alleging that in late 2017, there had been a failed plot for Assange to escape the embassy and travel to Russia, a narrative that has been thoroughly debunked by Assange’s lawyers and WikiLeaks staff.

Instead, in 2017 there were discussions between Assange, his lawyers and Ecuadorian officials, about conferring diplomatic status upon him to heighten his legal protections. There were also conversations about using that diplomatic status to seek refugee in a third-country. Aitor Matinez, one of Assange’s lawyers, told *MintPress* the countries Assange and his representatives proposed were China, Serbia, Greece, Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba. When an Ecuadorian official suggested Russia, it was dismissed out of hand by Assange.

The plans would come to nothing after they were discovered by the US. As Isikoff’s initial article on the CIA campaign against Assange documented, the American authorities and their British counterparts had planned a shoot-out and other terroristic methods in London if Assange did leave the building.

The discussions about Assange’s potential exit were surveilled by UC Global, and passed on to the CIA. A December 21, 2017 meeting between Assange and Rommy Vallejo, then the head of Ecuadorian intelligence, prompted particular panic. Within 24 hours of the discussion, which reportedly centred on the means of

Assange exiting the embassy, the US issued an international warrant for his arrest, demonstrating that it had been apprised of the conversation and its content by UC Global.

One of Kirchgaessner’s messages to her UC Global source is particularly significant. On November 12, 2018, she asked them for a “transcript” of the meeting between Vallejo and Assange. This would clearly indicate awareness that Assange’s meetings were being spied on by an entity that was hostile to him. The conversation with Vallejo was attended by Assange’s lawyers, meaning the *Guardian* reporter was requesting illegal material, obtained through covert surveillance, of privileged discussions involving a political refugee and his attorneys.

At the time, the *Guardian* was pumping out false stories seeking to depict Assange as a “Russian agent.” This included a notorious 2018 piece, alleging that Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort had visited the WikiLeaks founder in the embassy. *MintPress* cited internal UC Global reports indicating that the firm had tried to find evidence of such a visit, prior to it taking the security contract, but had come up empty handed. The *Guardian* published its lies about a fictitious meeting nonetheless and has never retracted them.

The latest revelations demonstrate that the web of those implicated in the illegal campaign against Assange is wide. The *Guardian* collaborated with entities, including UC Global, whom it must have known were themselves collaborating with the US authorities against Assange.

Beyond underscoring the role of the official press as a willing accomplice of the intelligence agencies, however, this suggests that the spying operation was an open secret in the political and media establishment. If the *Guardian* was aware of the illegal surveillance, so too must have been sections of the British Labour Party, the British government, and their counterparts in Australia.

The ongoing exposures of this conspiracy demonstrate that the fight to free Assange requires a political movement of the working class, directed against the entire official set-up.



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