

UK Home Secretary Patel approves extradition of Julian Assange to the United States

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UK Home Secretary Priti Patel has approved the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States. If extradited, he faces life imprisonment on charges under the Espionage Act for journalism exposing US war crimes, coup plots and human rights abuses and the complicity of the UK and other imperialist allies.

After over 11 and half years since he was first arrested in London in December 2010, kept in arbitrary detention and then imprisoned in London's maximum security Belmarsh, the British government has dispensed with all legal norms and signed an order that could well result in Assange's death.

A Home Office spokesperson said, "Under the Extradition Act 2003, the secretary of state must sign an extradition order if there are no grounds to prohibit the order being made.

"Extradition requests are only sent to the home secretary once a judge decides it can proceed after considering various aspects of the case.

"On 17 June, following consideration by both the magistrates court and high court, the extradition of Mr Julian Assange to the US was ordered. Mr Assange retains the normal 14-day right to appeal.

"In this case, the UK courts have not found that it would be oppressive, unjust or an abuse of process to extradite Mr Assange."

Patel's decision obliterates any notion of democracy and due process. WikiLeaks denounced the decision as a "dark day for Press freedom and for British democracy". It announced it would appeal the decision to the UK High Court.

WikiLeaks stated, "This is a dark day for press freedom and for British democracy. Anyone in this

country who cares about freedom of expression should be deeply ashamed that the Home Secretary has approved the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States, the country that plotted his assassination.

"Julian did nothing wrong. He has committed no crime and is not a criminal. He is a journalist and a publisher, and he is being punished for doing his job.

"It was in Priti Patel's power to do the right thing. Instead she will forever be remembered as an accomplice of the United States in its agenda to turn investigative journalism into a criminal enterprise.

"The Home Secretary is condoning not only the criminality committed by the US government against Julian, but also those US government crimes exposed by WikiLeaks."

The statement finished with the pledge, "The path to Julian's freedom is long and tortuous. Today is not the end of the fight. It is only the beginning of a new legal battle. We will appeal through the legal system, the next appeal will be before the High Court. We will fight louder and shout harder on the streets, we will organise and we will make Julian's story be known to all.

"Make no mistake, this has always been a political case. Julian published evidence that the country trying to extradite him committed war crimes and covered them up; tortured and rendered; bribed foreign officials; and corrupted judicial inquiries into US wrongdoing. Their revenge is to try to disappear him into the darkest recesses of their prison system for the rest of his life to deter others from holding governments to account.

"We will not let that happen. Julian's freedom is coupled to all our freedoms. We will fight to return Julian to his family and to regain freedom of expression

for us all.”

If Assange is not successful with his legal appeals, he will be handed over to the Biden administration. In 2010, amid a global manhunt orchestrated by the imperialist powers, Biden, then vice president to Barack Obama, described Assange as a “hi-tech terrorist”.

The decision of Patel, a political sadist, to sign the order was a foregone conclusion, assisted by a judiciary determined to ensure his extradition. In January 2021, district court judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled that Assange could not be extradited to the US on mental health grounds, acknowledging that the WikiLeaks founder was at severe risk of suicide. But her decision was overturned after an appeal by the US government, with Britain’s High Court judges accepting empty “assurances” that Assange would not be subject to oppressive prison conditions.

Patel’s decision came just one week after more than 300 doctors from 35 countries wrote to the home secretary calling on her to block Assange’s extradition, demanding his release. In signing the order Patel dismissed their grave concerns over Assange’s health.

Their letter declared, “In October 2021 Mr. Assange suffered a ‘mini-stroke’. This dangerous deterioration of Mr Assange’s health underscores the medical concern that the chronic stress caused by his harsh prison conditions, as well as his justified fear of the conditions that he would face in the case of extradition, leaves Mr Assange vulnerable to cardiovascular events.”

The doctors continued, “This dramatic deterioration of Mr Assange’s health has not yet been considered in his extradition proceedings. The US assurances accepted by the High Court, therefore, which would form the basis of any extradition approval, are founded upon outdated medical information, rendering them obsolete.”

Since taking over the Home Office under Conservative government Prime Minister Boris Johnson—who celebrated Assange being illegally dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy where he was seeking refuge in 2019—Patel has authored a raft of ever more draconian legislation. Her latest assault on democratic rights is the National Security Bill. It is a charter designed to criminalise protest at military sites and journalism exposing government lies used to

prepare and justify military aggression.

As it passed its second reading on June 6, a major step to becoming legislation over the next six months, Assange and WikiLeaks were the targets of frenzied denunciations in parliament by Tory MP’s. The government was backed by Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper. When asked by Tory MP Theresa Villiers if she would “condemn the WikiLeaks-type mass dumping of information in the public domain,” Cooper replied, “Yes, I strongly do, because some of the examples of such leaks that we have seen put agents’ lives at risk, put vital parts of our national security and intelligence infrastructure at risk and are highly irresponsible.”

The WSWS noted that enacting the legislation demonstrated that “the persecution of Assange is setting the precedent for an unprecedented assault on freedom of speech, protest and the media, in line with escalating plans for imperialist war abroad and social counterrevolution at home.”

Patel’s order means that Assange is a major step closer to being extradited to the United States. And given the record of the British judiciary and its contemptible treatment of the heroic journalist since 2010, there is no reason to anticipate a positive outcome to a High Court appeal.

The essential political response to this verdict must be to redouble the fight in the international working class to demand Assange’s freedom.



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