



British Judge Rejects U.S. Request to Extradite Assange

In a decision issued on January 4, U.K. District Judge Vanessa Baraitser rejected a request from the U.S. government to have WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange extradited on charges of illegally obtaining and sharing classified material related to national security.

Baraitser based her ruling partially on the risk of suicide if he is sent to U.S. custody.

“I find that the mental condition of Mr. Assange is such that it would be oppressive to extradite him to the United States of America,” Baraitser said in her decision.



Cancillería del Ecuador/flickr

NPR reported that Baraitser based her assessment on what she was told by a psychiatrist who analyzed Assange while he was in prison. The doctor told Baraitser that Assange was at a high risk of suicide if he ended up incarcerated in the U.S.

Assange was diagnosed in December 2019 with recurrent depressive disorder, which was at times severe, and sometimes accompanied by hallucinations and often with thoughts of suicide.

“I’m satisfied that Mr. Assange has the intellect and determination to circumvent the suicide prevention measures, as Professor Kopelman posted, Mr. Assange would not only find a way to suicide, but it will be executed with the single-minded determination of his ASD/Asperger’s,” the judge said in her ruling. “Facing conditions of mere total isolation, and without the protective factors which mitigate his risks at HMP Belmarsh, I am satisfied that the US procedures would not prevent Mr. Assange from committing suicide.”

Though Baraitser did not say so, there also remains the possibility that U.S. officials might consider Assange to be so troublesome that they would consider his suicide in their custody as a favorable outcome and do little to circumvent it.

“For those reasons, I’ve decided that extradition would be oppressive by reason of Mr. Assange’s mental health and I order his discharge under section 91 of the extradition act 2003. The United States has 14 days to appeal,” the judge concluded.

Even though Baraitser ordered Assange to be discharged, the U.S. government will continue to pursue his extradition.

“While we are extremely disappointed in the court’s ultimate decision, we are gratified that the United States prevailed on every point of law raised,” Justice Department spokesman Marc Raimondi said in a statement.

Raimondi said that the judge had rejected Assenge’s contentions that he was politically targeted and should be protected by free-speech laws, adding: “We will continue to seek Mr. Assange’s extradition to the United States.”

Assange, an Australian, took asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for seven years beginning in



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June 2012 to avoid an extradition order requested by Sweden that was unrelated to the U.S. charges.

Assange's asylum was revoked by the Ecuadorian government in April 2019, following WikiLeaks' publication of photos linking Ecuadorian President Lenín Moreno to a corruption scandal. The London Metropolitan Police were invited into the embassy and arrested Assange in connection with his failure to surrender to the court in June 2012 for extradition to Sweden. He was then sent to London's Belmarsh prison.

Swedish prosecutors dropped their investigation in November 2019, saying their evidence had weakened over time.

A month after Assange's expulsion from the Ecuadorian embassy and incarceration, the U.S. government further charged Assange with violating the Espionage Act of 1917. The U.S. government then pursued its request to extradite him.

In the wake of Baraitser's ruling, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said during his daily press briefing that Mexico is prepared to offer political asylum to Assange.

López Obrador called for Assange to be released last January.

"I don't know if he has recognized that he acted against rules and norms of a political system, but at the time these cables [released by WikiLeaks] demonstrated how the world system functions in its authoritarian nature," López Obrador said at a regular government news briefing last year in response to a question about Assange. "Hopefully consideration will be given to this, and he's released and won't continue to be tortured."

In response to the unexpected British court ruling, a report posted by the Ron Paul Institute noted, "Prominent libertarian communicator and former US House of Representatives Member Ron Paul has been among the longtime vocal supporters of the U.S. ending its effort to prosecute Assange." Paul noted that, as a candidate, Donald Trump said "I love WikiLeaks" more than 10 times on the campaign trail.

But Paul lamented the fact that Trump's enthusiasm for Assage ended with his election the presidency:

The real tragedy of the Trump presidency is nowhere better demonstrated than in Trump's 180 degree turn away from WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange. "I know nothing about WikiLeaks," he said as president. "It's really not my thing."...

It is ironic that a President Trump who has been victim of so much deep state meddling has done the deep state's bidding when it comes to Assange and WikiLeaks. President Trump should preempt the inevitable U.S. show trial of Assange by granting the journalist blanket pardon under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

It is not too late for Trump to see the wisdom in this recommendation and follow through.

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