

Sweden upholds Assange arrest warrant

By Paul Mitchell
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Last Friday, Sweden's Appeal Court upheld the arrest warrant against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has been confined in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London since claiming asylum in 2012.

Assange faces extradition on the pretext of bogus "minor rape" allegations, dropped as unsound and then resuscitated by the Swedish authorities in 2010, to provide the legal justification for his onward extradition to the United States to face a grand jury, life imprisonment and a possible death sentence.

Assange has always insisted he would return to Sweden if the government gave safeguards against his extradition to the US. Last week, he said he was prepared to travel to the US and accept imprisonment "despite its clear unlawfulness," if President Obama pardoned Chelsea Manning, the former US soldier who was given a 35-year jail sentence in 2013 for handing over 750,000 classified documents to WikiLeaks.

The "clear unlawfulness" meted out to Assange was highlighted by the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, which declared earlier this year, "If Mr. Assange leaves the confines of the Embassy, he forfeits his most effective and potentially only protection against refoulement to United States of America." It stated that his confinement violated international human rights legislation and ruled that "the arbitrary detention of Mr. Assange should be brought to an end, that his physical integrity and freedom of movement be respected, and that he should be entitled to an enforceable right to compensation."

Both Sweden and the UK rejected the ruling.

Friday's Appeal Court decision follows in the same vindictive manner and ignores the risk and consequences should Assange be extradited to the US. His Swedish lawyer, Per Samuelson, accused Sweden of capitulating to US pressure, declaring, "Today's domestic decision shows that Sweden is not yet prepared to abide by its international obligations under

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Convention Against Torture and to the UN."

"Sadly, Sweden has a long history of compromising its rule of law where the perceived interests of the United States are concerned, from helping the CIA kidnap people in Sweden, as in the cases of Agiza and al-Zery [asylum seekers returned to Egypt and tortured], to its 100 percent US extradition rate over the last 15 years.

"Mr Assange will appeal the decision and remains confident that his indefinite and unlawful detention will cease and that those responsible will be brought to justice," Samuelson concluded.

Swedish prosecutors have only now finally agreed to travel outside the country and question Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy via an Ecuadorian prosecutor, scheduled for October 17.

The significance of the decision to uphold the arrest warrant and the importance of silencing Assange is underscored by both the recent and planned revelations from WikiLeaks, which have led US news outlets to declare they could determine who enters the White House as president this year.

In July, WikiLeaks released thousands of internal Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails, which exposed the underhand methods it employed to subvert the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and assist Hillary Clinton. Assange is now threatening to release "a lot more" leaked information, claiming Clinton, while serving as Secretary of State during Obama's first tenure, authorised weapons shipments destined for Al Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS) forces in Libya and Syria. For exposing these criminal intrigues, reminiscent of the Reagan-era Iran-Contra events, the witch-hunt against Assange has intensified, with attempts to brand him a "dupe" or agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Assange's fears of extradition to the US are fully

justified and Chelsea Manning's brutal treatment is a warning of the vindictive and brutal response to be expected from the US state.

On the same day Sweden's Appeal Court made its decision, a British Magistrates' Court authorised the extradition to the US of 31-year-old student, Lauri Love. US prosecutors have charged Love under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act with hacking into government and corporate computer systems, including the Federal Reserve Bank, the Department of Defense and NASA. Love's actions were part of "Operation Last Resort" by the "hactivist" group Anonymous, a 2012-13 online protest against the treatment of Aaron Swartz, who committed suicide rather than face a lifetime in prison, while awaiting trial on hacking and fraud charges.

Love's US lawyer, Tor Ekeland, explained that he "could potentially face life in prison in the United States for what are essentially highly innocuous acts. I think the punishment that they're seeking is disproportionate to any alleged harm."

"It's important to note that none of this information was top secret. I don't really think any of it was that sensitive. It mainly, as far as I can tell from the indictments, consisted of names, phone numbers, email addresses and a couple of instances where there were credit card numbers which don't appear ever to have been used anywhere," he said.

Love has not been charged under British law, but could receive a 99-year prison sentence in the US. Love has Asperger syndrome and a history of depression. Despite all this evidence, and accepting that there was a substantial risk that Love would commit suicide if extradited, Judge Nina Tempia came to the incredible conclusion that "Mr Love has not shown it will be either unjust or oppressive to extradite and there will be a real risk to Mr Love of being severely ill-treated... I am also satisfied that Mr Love will receive dedicated mental and physical health care in the US."

Tempia brushed aside the fact the evidence against Love was of a digital nature and could be used in a British court, saying the witnesses, which number about 20, including an anonymous FBI informant who had infiltrated an online "chat room" used by Love, lived in the US.

The Love case was the first test of the so-called "forum bar" introduced by the then home secretary,

now Prime Minister Theresa May in 2012 to allow UK citizens to challenge US extradition requests if the alleged crimes mainly took place on British soil. This followed the eventually successful 10-year battle against extradition by Gary McKinnon for alleged hacking into US military systems. Sarah Harrison, director of the Courage Foundation, which organises Love's defence campaign, explained, "Clear assurances were given that legal changes would prevent the McKinnon situation from happening again and, frankly, if the forum bar can't help Lauri Love, it's very difficult to understand how it could ever help anyone. This is not what the public was led to believe at the time, and it's not something we should stand for."

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