

Ecuador cuts off Julian Assange's access to the outside world

By Mike Head
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Ecuador's government has cut off all WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange's communications and contact from inside its London embassy, on the grounds that he posted a tweet condemning the arrest of former Catalan regional president Carles Puigdemont.

WikiLeaks yesterday confirmed: "WikiLeaks editor @julianassange has been gagged and isolated by order of Ecuador's new president @Lenin Moreno. He cannot tweet, speak to the press, receive visitors or make telephone calls."

The Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* denounces the new restrictions on Julian Assange's ability to communicate with his innumerable supporters throughout the world.

Ecuador's move, announced on Tuesday, came after Assange tweeted on Monday challenging Britain's accusation that Russia was responsible for the alleged nerve agent poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the English city of Salisbury earlier this month.

The Ecuadorian decision is a dire threat to Assange. He faces total isolation as a virtual prisoner in the tiny embassy and the increased danger of being extradited to be put on trial in the United States for espionage and treason, crimes carrying potential death penalties.

Ecuador's move is also a further direct attack on global free speech, in line with the growing censorship of the Internet, to silence political dissent and opposition to imperialism and war.

WikiLeaks reported that Ecuador demanded that Assange remove the following tweet, in which he pointed to the chilling historic precedent for Germany's decision to detain the Catalan leader at the behest of the Spanish government:

"In 1940 the elected president of Catalonia, Lluís Companys, was captured by the Gestapo, at the request

of Spain, delivered to them and executed. Today, German police have arrested the elected president of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, at the request of Spain, to be extradited."

Hitler's secret police, the Gestapo, detained Companys, who had fled into French exile in 1939 after General Franco, with German support, crushed the Spanish revolution and established a brutal dictatorship. The Nazis extradited Companys to Madrid, where he was tortured, sentenced to death and executed.

European and other imperialist powers are behind Ecuador's action. In a statement, Ecuador said Assange's recent behaviour on social media "put at risk the good relations [Ecuador] maintains with the United Kingdom, with the other states of the European Union, and with other nations."

On Monday, Assange questioned why Britain and its allies had expelled Russian diplomats over the Skripal poisoning. "While it is reasonable for Theresa May to view the Russian state as the leading suspect, so far the evidence is circumstantial & the OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] has not yet made any independent confirmation, permitting the Kremlin to push the view domestically that Russia is persecuted," he tweeted.

In another tweet, Assange pointed out that "21 US allies have expelled diplomats over an unresolved event in the UK and that the US expelled nearly three times as many diplomats as the UK, the alleged victim country."

Despite trumped-up Swedish government "sexual assault" allegations against Assange being dropped long ago, he still faces immediate arrest if he steps outside the Ecuadorian embassy, where he has been confined for nearly six years with little access to

sunlight, fresh air or exercise.

Swedish authorities last year formally closed their investigation, effectively confirming that there was never any genuine case in the first place. What was involved was a “dirty tricks” operation aimed at discrediting and paralysing WikiLeaks and putting Assange behind bars, or worse.

On Tuesday, Ecuador claimed Assange had breached “a written commitment made to the government at the end of 2017 not to issue messages that might interfere with other states.”

However, its measures go beyond its previous actions. In October 2016, it suspended Assange’s Internet access after WikiLeaks published revealing leaked emails from Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign. In May 2017, Ecuadorian President Moreno insisted that Assange refrain from commenting on Spain’s dispute with Catalonia. Assange had tweeted that Madrid was guilty of “repression.”

After Assange’s comments on the Skripal case, British Foreign Office Minister Alan Duncan called him a “miserable little worm” and said he should leave the Ecuadorian embassy and surrender to British “justice.”

Assange replied: “Britain should come clean on whether it intends to extradite me to the United States for publishing the truth and cease its ongoing violation of the UN rulings in this matter.”

In 2015, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention condemned Assange’s detention as “arbitrary, unreasonable, unnecessary, disproportionate” and called for him to be immediately freed and compensated.

The true face of British justice was displayed in February. A judge in London rejected an application by Assange to withdraw a British arrest warrant issued against him in 2012, even though a Swedish-initiated European arrest warrant—the trigger for the British warrant—was cancelled in May 2017.

The Trump administration’s Attorney General Jeff Sessions said last April that Assange’s arrest to face a sealed US indictment remains “a priority.” The US political, military and intelligence establishment is determined to punish and silence Assange for having exposed its war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and its diplomatic intrigues and mass surveillance around the world.

This included WikiLeaks’ release of the “collateral murder” video showing the 2007 US helicopter massacre of 12 Iraqi civilians, the posting of over 250,000 secret US diplomatic cables, and the publication of thousands of files detailing the CIA’s “malware” operations to secretly seize control of computer networks.

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