

Trump ordered Assange's seizure by British police and wanted him dead

By Thomas Scripps and Chris Marsden
3 March 2020

Journalist Cassandra Fairbanks has revealed an explosive series of communications on the case of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange between herself and Republican operative Arthur Schwartz.

They confirm that the attempted extradition of Assange is a criminal enterprise, aimed at silencing someone who has exposed US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and to intimidate all opponents of imperialist war. They prove that all methods of doing so are being discussed, including the death penalty.

Assange is part-way through a hearing that began last week to decide on his extradition to the US where he faces 175 years in prison on espionage charges. He was imprisoned after being illegally dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had claimed political asylum, by British police in April 2019.

According to Fairbanks's leaked conversations, high-level US officials arranged a deal with the Ecuadorian government in 2018 to secure Assange's seizure, ostensibly in return for their taking the death penalty, which the Trump administration clearly wanted, off the table.

The deal was organised by President Trump's current national director of intelligence, Richard Grenell, while he was working as US ambassador to Germany. Fairbanks's information makes clear that Assange's arrest and extradition were sought under direct instruction from the president's office.

Fairbanks explains that she posted a message supportive of Assange with a chat group of pro-Trump campaigners, including Grenell and Schwartz, on October 30, 2018. Schwartz, with whom she "had always been friendly," telephoned her shortly afterward to say she needed to stop supporting WikiLeaks:

He was saying ... that a deal had already been made

to go into the embassy, that they were going to arrest Julian. ... He was saying that I was involved in the Trump social world ... and that people would understand that I supported Wikileaks before I knew that Julian was a bad guy. But that they wouldn't be very understanding when all these bad things came out about him.

Fairbanks described the call as "threatening" and "intimidating."

In subsequent text messages via the encrypted service Signal, archived by Fairbanks, Schwartz said to Fairbanks in reference to Assange, "I wouldn't get so emotional until you see exactly what that worthless piece of garbage did. ... There's a good reason the death penalty was on the table."

Fairbanks also confirms that Assange's every conversation in the embassy was recorded by the security firm UC Global and relayed directly to the Trump administration. In January 2019 and again on March 27, she travelled to the Ecuadorian embassy to warn Assange. Suspecting surveillance, they used written notes and white noise to try and keep their conversation private. Despite these precautions, on March 29, 2019, Fairbanks received another call from Schwartz in which he "told me that he knew that I had told Assange and that there was a State Department investigation into who leaked me that information."

On September 10, 2019, Fairbanks posted a tweet referring to an ABC News report publicly revealing the deal done between the Ecuadorian and US governments to secure Assange's arrest. Anonymous sources told ABC News that Ecuador's ambassador to Germany, Manuel Mejia Dalmau, held an "emergency meeting" in late 2018 with Grenell, asking whether the US would commit to not employing the death penalty against Assange.

Grenell contacted the US Justice Department and apparently received the consent of Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, thus allowing him to make a deal with Ecuador.

Fairbanks tweeted that Grenell “was the one who worked out the deal for Julian Assange’s arrest.” Shortly afterwards, Schwartz called her to demand she take down the tweet, saying, “Rick’s role is classified. ... Someone’s going to go to jail.” Schwartz revealed that Grenell was acting on direct orders from President Donald Trump. “Please. I’m begging you ... He [Grenell] is taking orders from the president. Ok?”

Fairbanks agreed to take down the tweet, revealing her dealings with Schwartz only on February 25. She combines support for Assange with political associations with far-right and fascist individuals, including Trump administration personnel who want him destroyed. Fairbanks was spoken to as a friend by Schwartz, who gave her information not meant for public ears.

The Schwartz-Fairbanks communications confirm that the extradition hearing begun last week at Belmarsh Magistrates Court is a show trial—a fig leaf to cover a political conspiracy between US and British imperialism to silence Assange forever. The verdict is just as surely predetermined behind the scenes as was Ecuador’s collusion in his seizure.

Given that Assange has committed no crime in publishing information clearly in the public interest, the US extradition request should have been automatically denied. The Anglo-US Extradition Treaty (2007) prohibits extradition if the alleged offence “for which extradition is requested is a political offense.”

The Extradition Act (2003), which incorporates the terms of the treaty into domestic law, prohibits extradition “for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing” someone for his “political opinions,” or even in cases where someone “might be prejudiced at his trial or punished, detained or restricted in his personal liberty by reason” of his “political opinions.”

Extradition hearings proceed because the UK is just as hostile to Assange as the US. Last weekend, journalists Matt Kennard and Mark Curtis revealed that Sajid Javid, who as Conservative government home secretary approved the US extradition request, attended six annual meetings of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), which has close ties to the US intelligence community. He spoke at one event alongside then- *National Review* editor Jonah Goldberg, who asked in a column published on the AEI website, “Why wasn’t Assange garrotted in

his hotel room years ago?” Neo-con ideologue Bill Kristol, who also spoke, wrote a column asking, “Why can’t we use our various assets to harass, snatch or neutralize Julian Assange and his collaborators, wherever they are?”

At last week’s extradition hearing, Assange’s legal team explained that they would be presenting evidence from an unnamed whistle-blower detailing conversations between UC Global and the CIA “about whether there should be more extreme measures contemplated, such as kidnapping or poisoning Julian Assange in the embassy.” These discussions included suggesting that the embassy door could be left open to make a kidnapping look like it could have been “an accident.”

The UK authorities have ignored this mountain of evidence of threats to Assange’s life because the possibility of a death penalty automatically bars extradition. They know that the promise extended to Ecuador is worthless. If Assange is extradited, he faces either a life sentence or execution. Preventing this demands the mass mobilisation of the working class in Assange’s defence.

No justice can be expected at the hands of the corrupt British courts. During the four days of proceedings last week, Assange was forced to sit in a bulletproof glass box, without access to his lawyers to properly frame his defence and under constant surveillance by prison officers, and also no doubt by CIA spies in the courtroom. He was handcuffed, strip-searched and heavily medicated—all with the approval of presiding magistrate Vanessa Baraitser. She ruled that Assange must remain in a dock encased in reinforced glass when the extradition hearing resumes in May.

To end this pseudo-legal nightmare demands that a struggle be waged throughout the world, with meetings held in every workplace, college and university to demand Assange’s freedom and that of the heroic whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

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