



## TECH

# WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange cannot be extradited to U.S., judge rules

PUBLISHED MON, JAN 4 2021•6:03 AM EST    UPDATED MON, JAN 4 2021•9:27 AM EST

Sam Shead

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## KEY POINTS

The U.S. is expected to appeal the decision within the allocated two-week time frame.

The WikiLeaks founder, whose health has deteriorated while being held in a U.K. prison, is wanted on 18 charges, 17 of which fall under the U.S. Espionage Act.

Assange is wanted in the U.S. over the publication of hundreds of thousands of classified military documents and diplomatic cables in 2010 and 2011.



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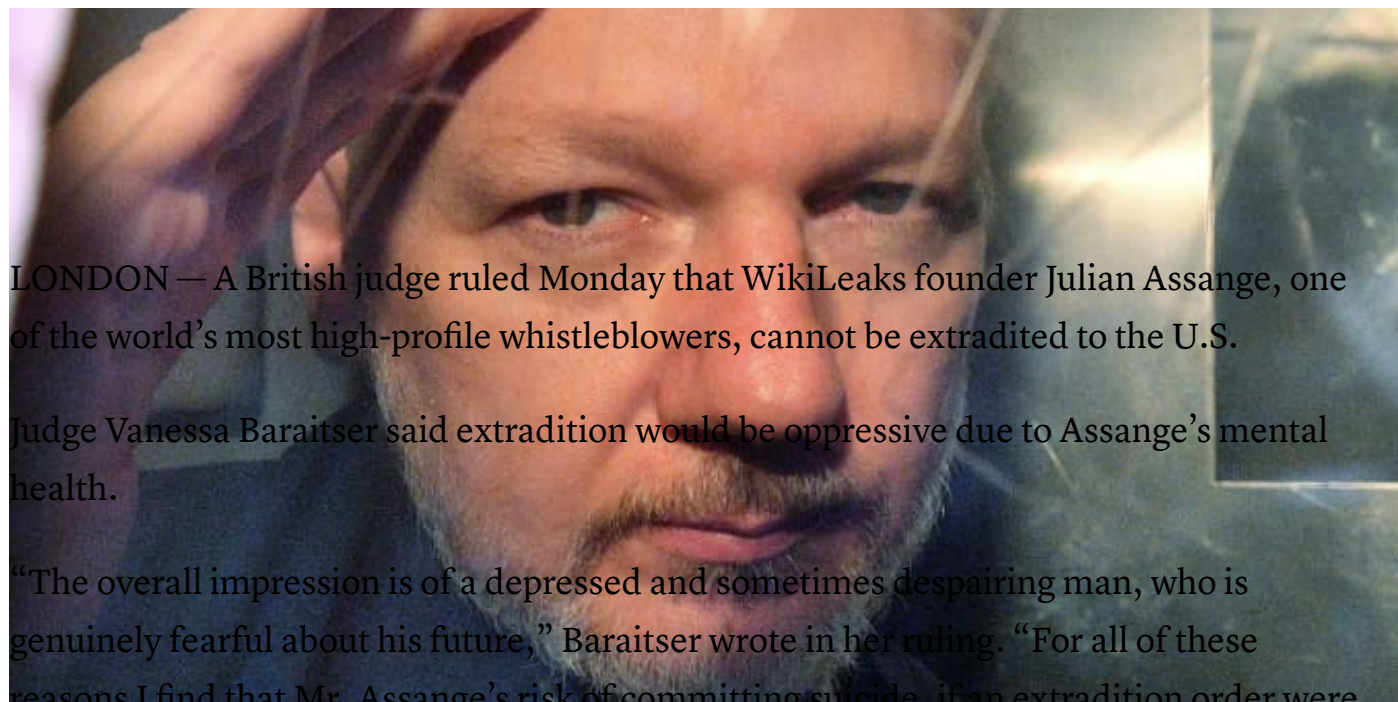
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LONDON — A British judge ruled Monday that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, one of the world's most high-profile whistleblowers, cannot be extradited to the U.S.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser said extradition would be oppressive due to Assange's mental health.

"The overall impression is of a depressed and sometimes despairing man, who is genuinely fearful about his future," Baraitser wrote in her ruling. "For all of these reasons I find that Mr. Assange's risk of committing suicide, if an extradition order were to be made, to be substantial."

The U.S. is expected to appeal the decision within the allocated two-week time frame.

Assange is wanted in the U.S. over the publication of hundreds of thousands of classified military documents and diplomatic cables in 2010 and 2011. He is wanted on 18 charges, 17 of which fall under the U.S. Espionage Act.



His health has deteriorated while being held in the U.K.'s Belmarsh prison in southeast London. He was returned to the prison following the court hearing and a full application for his bail will be made on Wednesday.

Baraitser ruled that while U.S. prosecutors met the tests for Assange to be extradited, the U.S. was incapable of preventing him from attempting to commit suicide.

“Faced with the conditions of near total isolation without the protective factors which limited his risk at HMP Belmarsh, I am satisfied the procedures described by the U.S. will not prevent Mr Assange from finding a way to commit suicide and for this reason I have decided extradition would be oppressive by reason of mental harm and I order his discharge,” she said.

The U.S. has specifically accused Assange of conspiring with army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to decipher a password known as “hash” in order to access a classified U.S. Department of Defense computer and expose military secrets.

Assange's supporters argue that the U.S. is targeting him for political reasons after his journalism exposed alleged war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as human rights abuses.

If the 49-year-old Australian is extradited and convicted in the U.S., he could be sentenced to 30 to 40 years in prison, his lawyers have said. His mother, Christine Assange, said on Twitter that he won't survive if he is extradited. Prosecutors have said he would face no more than 5¼ years behind bars.

Assange's lawyers said in a closing written submission to Baraitser that the prosecution had been politically motivated “during a unique period of U.S. history under the (President Donald) Trump administration.”

The legal team representing the U.S. said federal prosecutors are forbidden to consider political opinion in making their decisions.



conferred with members of hacking organizations and tried to recruit hackers at conferences in Europe and Asia who could provide WikiLeaks with classified information.

Assange's lawyer, Edward Fitzgerald, tried to delay the hearing, [arguing in August](#) that the indictment arrived too late for his team to review and respond to it properly. James Lewis represented the U.S. authorities.

Fitzgerald said he had not seen Assange face to face for six months, partly due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to the BBC. However, a bid to rule out the new charges was unsuccessful.

Speaking from a glass box in August, [Assange said](#) he did not consent to extradition.

The hearing lasted four weeks, with dozens of witnesses called to give evidence.

## Locked up in Belmarsh

WikiLeaks published U.S. military video footage in 2010 showing a 2007 Apache helicopter attack in Baghdad that killed a dozen people. It then published thousands of secret military documents and diplomatic cables.

Soon after, Sweden tried to extradite Assange from Britain for alleged sex crimes. When he lost that case in 2012, he fled to the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and sought asylum.

Assange was arrested at the embassy in April 2019 for breaching his bail conditions and has since been held at the high-security Belmarsh Prison in southeast London.

In a statement issued outside the court on Monday, Assange's partner, Stella Moris, said Monday's victory was the first step towards justice in this case.

"We are pleased that the court has recognized the seriousness and inhumanity of what he has endured and what he faces," she said.



concerned that the U.S. government has decided to appeal this decision.

Moris added that “we will never accept that journalism is a crime in this country or any other.”

Moris launched a crowdfunding campaign last month to pay for Assange’s legal fees. Over £175,000 (\$239,000) has been pledged.



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