



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on August 26, 2012

In Assange Standoff, Britain Ends Siege of Ecuador's Embassy

Metro London police are standing down and will not be storming Ecuador's embassy according to a statement made by Ecuador's President Rafeal Correa (pictured). "We consider this unfortunate incident over, after a grave diplomatic error by the British in which they said they would enter our embassy," Correa said on Saturday in a weekly media address.



The conflict began after Correa granted diplomatic asylum to Julian Assange, the founder and editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks.

Various outlets are reporting that on Saturday the British Foreign Office informed Quito that the diplomatic standoff was over and there was no longer a threat to enter the embassy.

This announcement came one day after [representatives from the 34-member Organization of American States \(OAS\)](#) meeting at its Washington, D.C. headquarters called on Great Britain and Ecuador to end their stalemate. The resolution passed by the hemispheric bloc supported the "inviolability of diplomatic missions."

[Under pressure from the United States, Canada, Panama, and others](#), all specific references to the British threat to the Ecuadorian embassy in London were stricken from the OAS statement. The U.S. opposed the passage of any motion on the matter, insisting that the OAS meeting was not the best place to hammer out an agreement between two nations, especially when one of the parties is not a member of the group.

The war of words began on August 16 after Ecuador decided to grant asylum to Assange.

Ecuador's foreign minister Ricardo Patino [denounced the threatened revocation](#) of diplomatic status, reminding the UK that Ecuador was no longer a British colony. "We want to be very clear, we're not a British colony. The colonial times are over," Patino said after a meeting with Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa.

For its part, the British government dismissed Ecuador's act to protect Assange, insisting that he remains a fugitive from justice.

"The United Kingdom does not recognize the principle of diplomatic asylum," [said British foreign secretary William Hague](#). Hague cited the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act 1987, claiming that Britain could legally revoke the Ecuador embassy's diplomatic status. Hague also warned that Britain would not grant Assange safe passage out of the embassy.

Hague's commitment to capturing Assange was confirmed by a Scotland Yard document accidentally made public after a photograph of it being carried under the arm of a police officer was published August 24.

Details of the document's contents were [revealed by the Guardian newspaper](#).



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The brief begins: "BRIEF — EQ. Embassy brief — Summary of current position Re Assange. Action required – Assange to be arrested under all circumstances." It then makes reference to a "dip bag" and a "dip vehicle."

A Scotland Yard spokesman said: "The document is one officer's notes from a briefing. Our objective is to arrest Julian Assange for breach of bail. Under no circumstances would any arrest be made which was in breach of diplomatic immunity."

Assange sought refuge at the embassy in June, after the [Supreme Court of the United Kingdom denied his application](#) to reconsider his appeal of an earlier decision by that court.

The case brought before the Supreme Court of the U.K. concerned whether a [European Arrest Warrant](#) (EAW) issued by Sweden for Julian Assange was valid. In its ruling of May 30, the seven-member panel of judges held that the EAW was valid and as a result Assange now will be extradited to Sweden to face allegations of sexual assault.

The events that led to Assange's arrest (without charge or due process) are well-known.

In late July 2010, WikiLeaks released the so-called Afghan War Diary. These documents are a collection of internal U.S. military logs of the war in Afghanistan that appear to confirm Pakistani aid to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as well as the disclosure of the numerous civilian casualties of the military action of the United States.

In the days following the Afghan War Diary release, Julian Assange traveled to Sweden hoping to establish residency and to move the headquarters of WikiLeaks there in order to take advantage of that country's liberal whistleblower laws.

Assange admits that while in Sweden he had consensual sex with two women in August 2010.

Although Ecuador has extended its diplomatic cover to him, Assange fears that if he is forced to return to Sweden, that country might then extradite him to the United States where he could face serious charges of espionage or conspiracy regarding WikiLeaks' disclosure of the Afghan War Diary and other documents revealing the U.S. government's purposeful deception in its prosecution of illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A [WikiLeaks disclosure made in February of e-mails from the Austin, Texas-based security firm Stratfor](#) appears to confirm that a U.S. grand jury secretly indicted Assange around January 26, 2011.

[Reuters reports](#) that President Correa "shares Assange's fears that if handed over to Sweden, he could then be extradited to the United States to face charges over WikiLeaks' 2010 publication of secret U.S. cables."

The U.S. State Department denies that the United States plans to prosecute Assange. "This is an issue between the Ecuadoreans, the Brits, the Swedes," [Reuters quotes State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland](#) saying. "With regard to the charge that the U.S. was intent on persecuting him, I reject that completely," she added.

Assange doesn't buy the denial.

[In a statement made August 19 from the Ecuadorian embassy](#), Assange called upon the government of the United States to "renounce its witch hunt against Wikileaks" and to "dissolve its FBI investigation."

Declaring that as there is "unity in the oppression," Assange railed against the Obama administration's persecution of whistleblowers. Specifically he called for the pardoning of Thomas Drake, William



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Binney, and John Kirakou and for the release of PFC Bradley Manning.

Manning was described by Assange as a “hero, an example to us all and one of the world’s foremost political prisoners.”

As Assange rightly noted in his speech, Manning has been confined for over 800 days without a trial.

Despite the truth in much of what he had to say — and perhaps because of it — Assange’s address is unlikely to remove the threat of ultimate extradition to the United States.

Ecuador insists that its extension of asylum to Assange is not intended to shield him from Swedish prosecution. In fact, if Britain and Sweden will promise not to hand Assange over to the United States (or any third country), then the exiled WikiLeaks editor will reportedly “[hand himself over to Swedish authorities](#).”

Photo of Rafeal Correa: AP Images



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