

Ecuador may be close to ejecting WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange from its London embassy

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Ecuador appears to be finalizing plans to withdraw its asylum protection for Wikileaks founder Julian Assange as early as next week, eject him from its London embassy and turn him over to British authorities, according to media reports.

Assange, 47, has been holed up in the embassy since 2012, after taking refuge to avoid extradition to Sweden where he was wanted for questioning over allegations of sexual assault and rape.

Although Sweden has since dropped its investigation into the rape accusation, Assange has chosen not to leave the embassy out of concern that the U.S. would immediately seek his arrest and extradition over the leaking of classified documents to WikiLeaks by Chelsea Manning.

WikiLeaks is also the focus of the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections by distributing hacked materials.

Ecuador has grown increasingly unhappy with the asylum arrangement in recent months. In March, Ecuador barred Assange from using the Internet from the embassy for violating an agreement he signed at the end of 2017 not to use his communiques to interfere in the affairs of other states.

Ecuador has toughened its stance following the election in May of President Lenin Moreno, who has described Assange as a “hacker,” an “inherited problem” and a “stone in the shoe.”

Assange, an Australian computer programmer, particularly drew the ire of Ecuador by angering the Spanish government with his support for separatist leaders in Spain's Catalonia region who sought to secede last year.

The Times of London reported last week that British ministers and senior Foreign Office officials were "locked in discussions over the fate of Assange."

In addition, RT, the Russian news outlet, quoted unidentified sources as saying Ecuador is ready to hand over Assange to the British authorities "in coming weeks or even days."

Glen Greenwald, editor of the The Intercept, reported Saturday that he expects Moreno to finalize an agreement with British authorities during his trip to London on Friday ostensibly for a world disabilities summit. Greenwald said Moreno also notably plans to travel to Madrid during his trip.

Greenwald quoted an unidentified source close to the Ecuadoran Foreign Ministry and the president's office as confirming that Moreno is close to a deal as early as this week.

Greenwald, former reporter for The Guardian, is a journalist and author who writes extensively about national security issues. He published a series of articles about U.S. and British global surveillance programs based in part on classified documents disclosed by Edward Snowden, a one-time U.S. contractor for the National Security Agency, who fled the country and found refuge in Russia.

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