

As British Judge Made Rulings Against Julian Assange, Her Husband Was Involved with Right-wing Lobby Group Briefing Against WikiLeaks Founder

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The husband of the chief magistrate overseeing Julian Assange's extradition case was closely associated with a lobby group publicly criticising the WikiLeaks founder around the time his wife was ruling against Assange, it can be revealed.

Westminster chief magistrate Lady Emma Arbuthnot made two key legal rulings against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in February 2018, which ensured he would not be able to take up his asylum in Ecuador.

Around this time, her husband, Lord James Arbuthnot, a former Conservative defence minister with [links](#) to the British military and intelligence establishment, was working closely with the neo-conservative Henry Jackson Society (HJS), a pressure group with a strongly anti-Assange agenda. Lord Arbuthnot has hosted and chaired events for the HJS at the House of Lords and long sat on its "political council".

The HJS has called Assange "bonkers and paranoid" and described the asylum given to him by the government of Ecuador as "the last seedy bolthole to which Mr Assange thinks he can run".

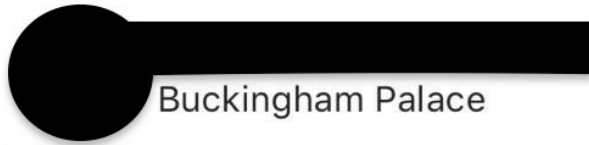
Priti Patel, the current UK home secretary who will [sign off](#) Assange's US extradition if ordered by the court, has also been closely involved with the HJS, including receiving financial benefits from the group.

On 6 February 2018, Lady Arbuthnot [dismissed](#) the request by Assange's lawyers to have his arrest warrant for skipping bail withdrawn, after the Swedish investigation into sexual assault allegations was dropped.

If this request had been granted, Assange may have been able to negotiate safe passage to Ecuador to prevent his persecution by the US government.

A week later, in a [second ruling](#), Lady Arbuthnot said: "I accept that Mr Assange had expressed fears of being returned to the United States from a very early stage in the Swedish extradition proceedings but... I do not find that Mr Assange's fears were reasonable."

Lady Arbuthnot also rejected the findings of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, commenting: “I do not find that Mr Assange’s stay in the Embassy is inappropriate, unjust, unpredictable, unreasonable, unnecessary or disproportionate.” She added: “I give little weight to the views of the Working Group.”



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Lady and Lord Arbuthnot attend the Queen’s garden party at Buckingham Palace in May 2017.
Anonymisation by Declassified. (Photo: Instagram)

‘Political council’

At the time of Lady Arbuthnot’s rulings, as well as before and since, Lord Arbuthnot has been closely associated with the HJS. According to the HJS’s archived web pages, Lord Arbuthnot has sat on the organisation’s “political council” for several years.

The earliest page impression *Declassified* could access, from [June 2013](#), confirms his position on the council. The last page impression available, from [December 2016](#), shows he

was still a member—one of four Conservative peers on the council.

The HJS and Lord Arbuthnot did not respond to *Declassified's* questions regarding whether he was still on the council—or what membership involves. Arbuthnot has, however, continued to partake in HJS events and is seen as a spokesperson for the organisation.

In July 2016, Lord Arbuthnot [chaired](#) a HJS event at the House of Lords and in July 2017 provided a [quote](#) for the HJS to mark the release of its report on Chinese investment in the UK.

Then, in November 2017, at the time Arbuthnot's wife had begun preparing the Assange case, the HJS released a report calling for an increase in the UK military budget for which Lord Arbuthnot provided a supportive quote.

On 2 April 2019, days before Assange was seized from the Ecuadorian embassy, the HJS [launched](#) a report on the Indo-Pacific at the House of Lords "by kind invitation of the Rt Hon. the Lord Arbuthnot of Eddisbury [sic]".

Neither the HJS nor Lord Arbuthnot responded to *Declassified's* questions about whether the political council had been consulted on the HJS's position on Julian Assange or WikiLeaks. The HJS has been [exposed](#) in WikiLeaks releases.

The HJS is closely aligned with the neo-conservative movement in the US and has access to the highest levels of the American government and its intelligence community.

During his visit to the UK in July, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke at a [roundtable](#) hosted by the HJS with whom the *Washington Post* described as "hawkish" members of the Conservative Party. UK Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, who also met with Pompeo, was previously on the HJS's [political council](#).

As director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in April 2017, Pompeo had [launched](#) a blistering attack on WikiLeaks calling the media organisation a "hostile intelligence service" that makes "common cause with dictators". Pompeo did not provide evidence but added a threat: "To give them the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. It ends now."

One of the HJS's ["international patrons"](#) is James Woolsey, the director of the CIA from 1993-95, while one [signatory](#) to its "Statement of Principles" – which [promote](#) Western military power – is Richard Dearlove, the former head of MI6.

HJS and Assange

HJS staff have been repeatedly [critical](#) of Assange and WikiLeaks in the British media since 2011 when its then associate director, Douglas Murray, engaged in a [combative debate](#) with Assange.

The following year, the HJS [posted](#) a video of Murray stating on Al-Jazeera English: "There is not a witch-hunt of WikiLeaks. An organisation illegally obtained, or stole as we used to call it, a whole set of government documents and published them with consequences which are still not fully understood."

Murray continued: “I think Mr Assange has been bonkers and paranoid for years, it’s part of his alleged political makeup, and indeed I would allege that of many of his supporters.”

Murray added that Assange’s mindset was “almost messianic in its delusional belief that it can override every single norm of international law, every single norm of criminal law, and of national law”. He concluded: “Ecuador is not a Mecca of freedom of speech, it isn’t the world capital of decency, it’s the last seedy bolthole to which Mr Assange thinks he can run”.

Over the following years, the HJS and its staff continued to be among the most active civil society voices for impugning the motives and reputation of Assange, in contrast to most human rights and media organisations which [argue](#) that extraditing the WikiLeaks publisher to the US would be a grave blow to press freedom.

In October 2016, the HJS released a [statement](#) to the media, which claimed: “Mr Assange has a long track record of stealing and distributing information, peddling conspiracy theories, and casting aspersions on the moral standing of western democratic governments. He has done this whilst supporting, and being supported by, autocratic regimes.”

No evidence was supplied to support the assertions. At the time, Lord Arbuthnot sat on the group’s political council.

Providing a quote for the statement, Douglas Murray, who remained as the HJS’s associate director until 2018, was described as “an early critic of Mr Assange’s views, challenging him directly on his anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories, and the assistance his work has provided to those seeking to undermine Western security”. No evidence was supplied for these claims.

Later in the same month, after Ecuador cut Assange’s internet connection inside its embassy, Davis Lewin, a “political analyst” at the HJS, [told](#) US-government funded outlet Voice of America: “I do hope that this is the precursor to them coming to their senses and finally forcing this man to face justice in the way that he should.”

Murray then wrote a [column](#) for *The Times* in January 2017 titled: “No, Mr Trump, you were right the first time — Assange is a wrong ‘un”.

HJS personnel—including spokesperson Sam Armstrong, chief of staff Ellie Green, and research fellow Paul Stott—have all [made anti-Assange interventions](#) in the British media.

In April 2019, after Julian Assange was seized from the embassy by British police, HJS director Alan Mendoza was put up as the counterweight against Assange’s lawyer on BBC’s flagship Newsnight programme. Posted to the HJS Youtube channel, Mendoza [told](#) the national broadcaster: “Journalists are not allowed to break the law in obtaining their materials.” He added: “I think it’s quite clear Mr Assange has spent many years evading justice, hiding in a room in Knightsbridge... Isn’t it time he actually answered questions in a court of law?”

Lady Arbuthnot’s rulings were also scathing about Assange’s perceived personal failings. She noted in her 2018 judgment: “He [Assange] appears to consider himself above the normal rules of law and wants justice only if it goes in his favour.” The judgment added: “Mr Assange has restricted his own freedom for a number of years. Defendants... come to court to face the consequences of their own choices. He should have the courage to do so too.”

Priti Patel

Home secretary Priti Patel, who would sign off the US extradition if ordered by the court, sat alongside Lord Arbuthnot on the HJS's political council from [2013](#) to [2016](#). For some of this time, she was in government, having become treasury minister in July 2014.

In July 2013, the HJS paid £2,500 for Patel to fly to Washington DC to be a delegate at a forum organised by Israel lobby group AIPAC, as well as a HJS-organised "programme" in the US Congress. Six months later, in December 2013, Patel hosted a [breakfast](#) in the UK parliament for the HJS.

Soon after becoming an MP in 2010, Patel was [appointed](#) a parliamentary officer of another powerful right-wing lobby group, Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI), while Lord Arbuthnot was acting as its parliamentary chairman. CFI has been [described](#) by Channel 4 as "beyond doubt the most well-connected and probably the best funded of all Westminster lobbying groups".



US Attorney General William Barr, left, and UK Home Secretary Priti Patel, right, sign the Cloud Act at a ceremony at the British Ambassador's residence in Washington, DC, US, 3 October 2019. (Photo: US Department of Justice)

In October 2019, as home secretary, Patel visited Washington DC to [meet](#) William Barr, the US Attorney General who is now in charge of the Assange case as head of the Department of Justice. Together they signed the Cloud Act which makes it easier for American and British law enforcement agencies to demand electronic data on targets as they undertake investigations.

In July, Assange's defence team [raised](#) the concern in court that Barr may be using Assange's extradition case in the UK for political ends.

Declassified has previously [revealed](#) that Sajid Javid, who as home secretary in 2019 certified the initial US extradition request for Assange, attended six secretive meetings organised by a US institute which has published calls for Assange to be assassinated or taken down.

Conflicts of interest

Declassified recently [revealed](#) that the HJS, which does not disclose its funders, had been given £80,000 by the UK Home Office to produce a report on UK connections to Islamist terrorism. The HJS was also [revealed](#) by the *Sunday Times* in 2017 to be receiving £10,000 a month from the Japanese embassy in London “to wage a propaganda campaign against China” in the British media.

The latest revelations come as the British judiciary gave its first formal statement to *Declassified* concerning allegations of conflicts of interests on the part of Lady Arbuthnot. In an email to *Declassified* for this article, they claimed “there has been no bias demonstrated by the chief magistrate” in the Assange case.

However, *Declassified* has repeatedly revealed that Lady Arbuthnot’s position is mired in conflicts of interests involving her [husband](#) and [son](#). *Declassified* previously [revealed](#) that Lady Arbuthnot personally received financial benefits from secretive “partner” organisations of the UK Foreign Office, which in 2018 [called](#) Assange a “miserable little worm”.

As far as is known, Lady Arbuthnot has never declared any conflicts of interest in the case and has never formally recused herself. It has been reported that Arbuthnot stepped aside from directly hearing the case [because](#) of a “perception of bias”, but it was not elucidated what this related to. This refusal means Assange’s defence team cannot revisit her previous rulings.

A Freedom of Information request sent by *Declassified* to the UK Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in August asking what this “perception of bias” pertained to — and whether Lady Arbuthnot had played a role in appointing the junior judge now ruling in the case — was rejected.

The MOJ said the information could not be disclosed because the request was “asking for an explanation” rather than “recorded information”. It further told *Declassified* it “does not hold any information” on what date the decision was made for Lady Arbuthnot to step aside from the case. The same questions put to Westminster Magistrates Court also went unanswered.

Declassified previously [revealed](#) that the MOJ has blocked the release of basic information about the current presiding judge in the case, Vanessa Baraitser, in what appears to be an irregular application of the Freedom of Information Act. Baraitser, who was likely chosen by Lady Arbuthnot, has a 96% extradition record, according to publicly available information.

The Henry Jackson Society, Priti Patel, Lord Arbuthnot, and Lady Arbuthnot, all did not respond to requests for comment.

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