

UK Home Secretary Priti Patel Was Part of CIA-linked Lobby Group with Husband of Assange Judge

By [Matt Kennard](#)

Global Research, April 22, 2022

[Declassified UK](#) 29 March 2022

Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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First published on March 31, 2022.

Home Secretary Priti Patel, who will soon decide whether to extradite Julian Assange to the US, has been a political adviser to – and been funded by – a right-wing lobby group which has attacked Assange in the British media for a decade.

Priti Patel sat on the Henry Jackson Society’s (HJS) advisory council from around [2013-16](#), although the exact dates are unclear as neither the HJS nor Patel responded to *Declassified*’s requests for clarification.

She has also received funds from the HJS, and was paid [£2,500](#) by the group to visit Washington in March 2013 to attend a “security” programme in the US Congress.

Patel, who became an MP in 2010 and was appointed Home Secretary in 2019, also [hosted](#) an HJS event in parliament soon after she returned from Washington.

After the UK Supreme Court said this month it was [refusing](#) to hear Assange’s appeal of a High Court decision against him, the WikiLeaks founder’s fate now lies in Patel’s hands. He faces [life in prison](#) in the US.

The HJS, which was founded in 2005 and does not disclose its funders, has links to the CIA, the intelligence agency behind the prosecution of Assange and which [reportedly](#) developed plans to assassinate him.

One of the HJS’s [international patrons](#) is James Woolsey, CIA director from 1993-95, who was in this role throughout the period Patel was advising the group. Woolsey’s affiliation to the HJS goes back to at least [2006](#), soon after it was founded.

In 2014, the group [hosted](#) General David Petraeus, CIA director from 2011-12, at a UK parliament meeting from which all media were [barred](#).

Three years later, in 2017, the HJS [organised](#) another event at parliament with General Michael Hayden, CIA director from 2006-9, to “discuss the current state of the American Intelligence Community and its relationships with foreign partners.”

Hayden described “the relationship within the Five Eyes community as strong as ever, despite potential concerns over recent intelligence leaks between members.” Five Eyes is an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US.

‘Perception of bias’

During a visit to the UK in July 2020, then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke at a [roundtable](#) hosted by the HJS with what the *Washington Post* referred to as a group of “hawkish” members of the Conservative Party.

As director of the CIA in 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.”

On the HJS advisory council at the [same time](#) as Patel was Lord James Arbuthnot, a former Conservative defence minister. His wife, Lady Emma Arbuthnot, was Westminster Chief Magistrate from 2016-2021.

For part of her tenure, she was in charge of the Assange case and made two key [rulings](#) against him in 2018. Lady Arbuthnot eventually [stepped aside](#) from ruling on the case because of a “perception of bias” but never declared a conflict of interest.

The links between Patel and Lord Arbuthnot go further. In 2010, soon after becoming an MP, Patel was [appointed](#) one of five parliamentary officers of the Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI) when the group was [chaired](#) by Lord Arbuthnot.

CFI has been [described](#) as “beyond doubt the most well-connected and probably the best funded of all Westminster lobbying groups”. It also does not disclose its funders.

Patel was forced to [resign](#) as Secretary of State for International Development in November 2017 after it was revealed that she had held more than a dozen undeclared meetings with Israeli ministers and organisations while on holiday in the country.

Many of these were arranged by CFI’s honorary president, Lord Polak. Patel’s resignation letter [accepted](#) that her conduct “fell below...standards of transparency and openness”.



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

'Bonkers and paranoid'

HJS staff have been repeatedly [critical](#) of Julian 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 media channel 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."

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.

This stands in contrast to nearly all human rights and press freedom organisations which [argue](#) that extraditing the WikiLeaks publisher to the US would be a grave blow to media freedom.

‘Conspiracy theories’

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.

A number of other HJS staff—including spokesperson Sam Armstrong and then chief of staff Ellie Green—have [made anti-Assange interventions](#) in the British media.

In April 2019, after Julian Assange was seized from the embassy by British police, HJS executive 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?”.

Secrecy

In October 2019, as home secretary, Patel visited Washington again to meet William Barr, the US Attorney General who was then in charge of the Assange case as head of the Department of Justice.

Together they signed the Cloud Act which [made it easier](#) for American and British law enforcement agencies to demand electronic data on targets as they undertake investigations.

Assange’s defence team had previously raised the [concern](#) in court that Barr may be using Assange’s extradition case in the UK for political ends.

In August 2020, *Declassified* requested basic information about Patel’s 2019 trip to Washington. The Home Office confirmed it held the information but refused to release it because the department considered “that disclosure of some of the information would prejudice relations between the UK and the United States”.

In May 2020, *Declassified* also requested information about any calls or emails made or received by Patel since she became Home Secretary which concerned the case of Julian

Assange, or mentioned his name.

The Home Office told us “we can neither confirm nor deny whether we hold the information you have requested” because “to do so either way would disclose information that constitutes the personal data of Julian Assange”.

The same request for Sajid Javid’s tenure as Home Secretary from 2018-19 was rejected because the department said “we have carried out a thorough search and we have established that the Home Office does not hold the information that you have requested.”

This was despite the fact Javid [signed](#) the initial US extradition request for Assange in June 2019. The shadow home secretary at the time, Diane Abbott, [opposed](#) approving the US extradition request.

Declassified previously [revealed](#) that before signing the US request, Javid had attended six secretive meetings, some attended by former CIA directors, which were organised by a US lobby group which has published calls for Assange to be assassinated or taken down.

The Home Office recently [admitted](#) it had eight officials working on Operation Pelican, the UK government [campaign](#) to seize Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

The department, however, claimed it did not know which other UK government ministries were involved in the operation.

Priti Patel and the Henry Jackson Society did not respond to requests for information and comment.

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Matt Kennard is chief investigator at Declassified UK. He was a fellow and then director at the Centre for Investigative Journalism in London. Follow him on Twitter @kennardmatt

Featured image: Priti Patel (R) meets Alejandro Mayorkas, US Secretary of Homeland Security, Washington DC, 17 November 2021. (Photo: Priti Patel / Twitter)

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