

# THE ASSANGE EXFILTRATION WOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE WAKE OF JOSHUA SCHULTE TOR ACTIVITY

The Guardian has a wild story about a joint Ecuadorian-Russian attempt to spring Julian Assange from the embassy. The idea was that he'd be snuck out of the Embassy in a diplomatic vehicle and sent to live in either Russia or Ecuador.

Sources said the escape plot involved giving Assange diplomatic documents so that Ecuador would be able to claim he enjoyed diplomatic immunity. As part of the operation, Assange was to be collected from the embassy in a diplomatic vehicle.

Four separate sources said the Kremlin was willing to offer support for the plan – including the possibility of allowing Assange to travel to Russia and live there. One of them said that an unidentified Russian businessman served as an intermediary in these discussions.

A single source claims that the plan was supposed to take place on Christmas Eve of last year.

The operation to extract Assange was provisionally scheduled for Christmas Eve in 2017, one source claimed, and was linked to an unsuccessful attempt by Ecuador to give Assange formal diplomatic status.

[snip]

Assange's Christmas Eve escape was aborted with just days to go, one source

claimed. Rommy Vallejo, the head of Ecuador's intelligence agency, allegedly travelled to the UK on or around 15 December 2017 to oversee the operation and left London when it was called off.

In February Vallejo quit his job and is believed to be in Nicaragua. He is under investigation for the alleged kidnapping in 2012 of a political rival to Correa.

I'm not 100% convinced about that timing for two reasons. First, because related events – Assange receiving Ecuadorian citizenship and Ecuador requesting he be given diplomatic status – only got reported in January.

The Foreign Office has turned down a request from the Ecuadorian government to grant the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, diplomatic status as a means of breaking the stalemate over his continued presence in the UK.

The development comes amid reports that Assange – an Australian who has been holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy for more than five years – has recently become a citizen of the South American state.

If awarded the status of a diplomat, it is thought, Assange could obtain certain rights to legal immunity and might be able to leave the embassy in Knightsbridge, and eventually the UK, without being arrested for breaching his former bail conditions.

Also, when Fidel Narváez denied involvement to the Guardian, he denied meetings with Russia *this year*, not last (though that's just as likely non-denial denial).

Two sources familiar with the inner workings of the Ecuadorian embassy said that Fidel Narváez, a close confidant of

Assange who until recently served as Ecuador's London consul, served as a point of contact with Moscow.

In an interview with the Guardian, Narváez denied having been involved in discussions with Russia about extracting Assange from the embassy.

Narváez said he visited Russia's embassy in Kensington twice this year as part of a group of "20-30 more diplomats from different countries". These were "open-public meetings", he said, that took place during the "UK-Russian crisis" – a reference to the aftermath of the novichok poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March.

That said, assuming the diplomatic request went in sometime in advance of the reporting on it, then the timing does make sense.

And that's interesting because it would mean the Ecuadorian-Russian attempt to exfiltrate Assange would have happened in the wake of accused Vault 7 leaker Joshua Schulte endangering his bail by hopping on Tor to do ... we don't know what. Whatever he did, however, it led to Schulte's detention in MCC and ultimately his delayed indictment for leaking the Vault 7 documents.

November 9, 2017:

Wikileaks publishes Vault 8 exploit

November 14, 2017: Assange posts Vault 8 Ambassador follow-up



Julian Assange ♦  
@JulianAssange

Following

Dear @DonaldJTrumpJr our offer of being ambassador to the US still stands. I could open a hotel style embassy in DC with luxury immunity suites for whistleblowers. The public will get a turbo-charged flow of intel about the latest CIA plots to undermine democracy. DM me.

#vault8

4:33 PM - 14 Nov 2017

November 14, 2017: Arrest warrant in VA

November 15, 2017: Charged in Loudon County for sexual assault

November 16, 2017: Use of Tor

November 17, 2017: Use of Tor

November 26, 2017: Use of Tor

November 29, 2017: Abundance of caution, attorney should obtain clearance

November 30, 2017: Use of Tor

December 5, 2017: Use of Tor, Smith withdraws

December 7, 2017: NYPD arrests on VA warrant for sexual assault

December 12, 2017: Move for detention, including description of email and Tor access

Separately, since the defendant was released on bail, the Government has obtained evidence that he has been using the Internet. First, the Government has obtained data from the service provider for the defendant's email account (the "Schulte Email Account"), which shows that the account has regularly been logged into and out of since the defendant was released on bail, most recently on the evening of December 6, 2017. Notably, the IP address used to access the Schulte Email Account is almost always the same IP address associated with the broadband internet account for the defendant's apartment (the "Broadband Account")—i.e., the account used by Schulte in the apartment to access the Internet via a Wi-Fi network.

Moreover, data from the Broadband Account shows that on November 16, 2017, the Broadband Account was used to access the "TOR" network, that is, a network that allows for anonymous communications on the Internet via a worldwide network of linked computer servers, and multiple layers of data encryption. The Broadband Account shows that additional TOR connections were made again on November 17, 26, 30, and December 5.

[snip]

First, there is clear and convincing evidence that the defendant has violated a release condition—namely, the condition that he shall not use the Internet without express authorization from Pretrial Services to do so. As explained above, data obtained from the Schulte Email Account and the Broadband Account strongly suggests that the defendant has been using the Internet since shortly after his release on bail. Especially troubling is the defendant's apparent use on five occasions of the TOR network. TOR networks enable anonymous communications over the Internet and could be used to download or view child pornography without detection. Indeed, the defendant has a history of using TOR networks. The defendant's Google searches obtained in this investigation show that on May 8, 2016, the defendant conducted multiple searches related to the use of

TOR to anonymously transfer encrypted data on the Internet. In particular, the defendant had searched for “setup for relay,” “test bridge relay,” and “tor relay vs bridge.” Each of these searches returned information regarding the use of interconnected computers on TOR to convey information, or the use of a computer to serve as the gateway (or bridge) into the TOR network.

Which is to say, things were falling apart in this period. And the response, tellingly, was for *the Russians* to try to find a way to exfiltrate Assange.

Update: Reuters describes the timing as still more problematic.

Ecuador last Dec. 19 approved a “special designation in favor of Mr. Julian Assange so that he can carry out functions at the Ecuadorean Embassy in Russia,” according to the letter written to opposition legislator Paola Vintimilla.

“Special designation” refers to the Ecuadorean president’s right to name political allies to a fixed number of diplomatic posts even if they are not career diplomats.

But Britain’s Foreign Office in a Dec. 21 note said it did not accept Assange as a diplomat and that it did not “consider that Mr. Assange enjoys any type of privileges and immunities under the Vienna Convention,” reads the letter, citing a British diplomatic note.

More and more this looks like an attempt to

legally exfiltrate him.