

Leaked evidence shows that Assange arrest came after Wikileaks publisher refused to name sources

by Tareq Haddad and Kit Klarenberg



A *Don't Extradite Assange* campaign sticker outside HMP Belmarsh where journalist Julian Assange is arbitrarily detained. (credit: [Bridges for Media Freedom](#))

U.S. President Donald Trump offered Julian Assange clemency in return for confirmation that Seth Rich was the source of leaked Democratic Party emails — only to push for the indictment of the Wikileaks founder when he refused to comply.

Text messages released last week by Kim Dotcom, the internet entrepreneur and close associate of Assange, revealed how he helped facilitate a **2017**

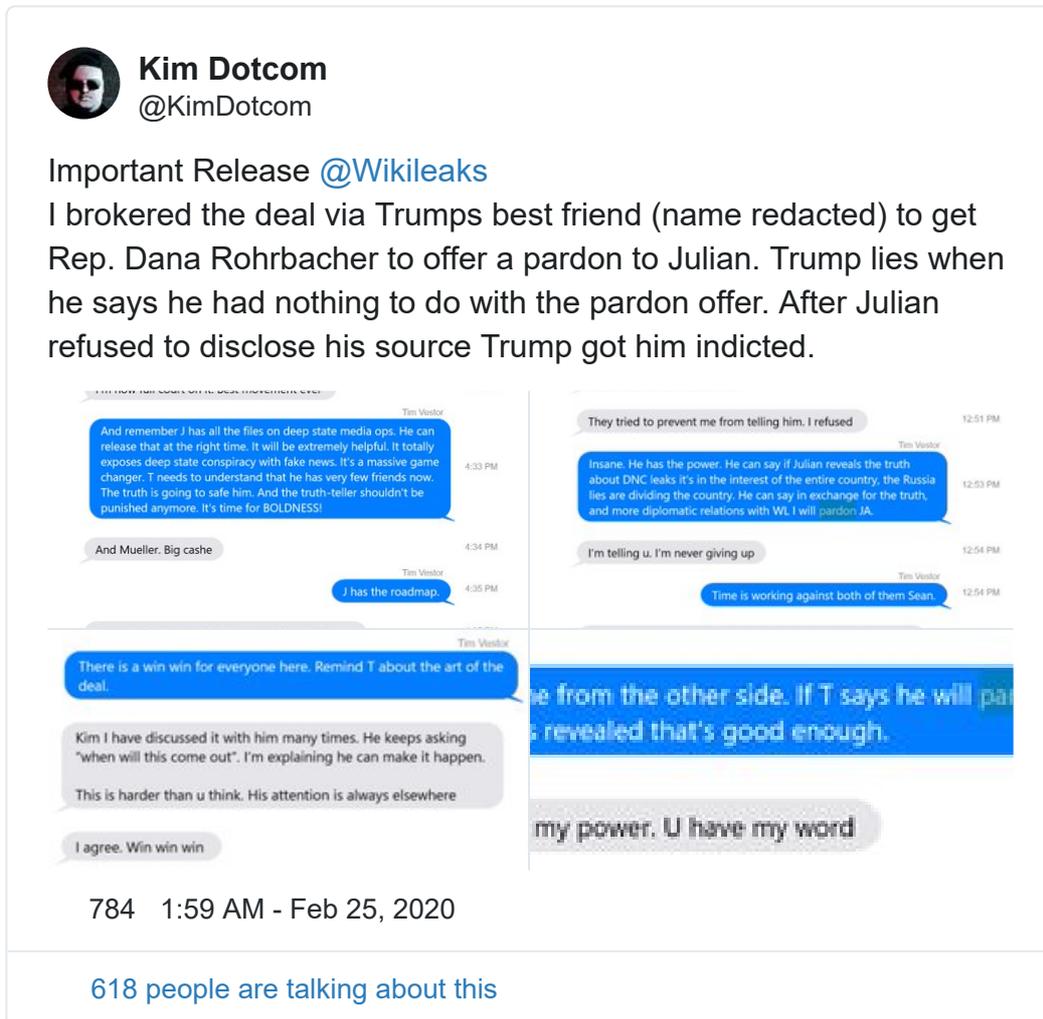
meeting between the 48-year-old Australian and former U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-Cal).

After his first meeting with Trump in **April of that year**, Rohrabacher travelled to meet Assange — then **arbitrarily detained** in Ecuador’s London embassy — after Dotcom brokered the arrangement through his friend and Fox News host, Sean Hannity.

In personal messages between the two, Hannity told Dotcom that the idea of a presidential pardon was “met with enthusiasm” by Trump (demarcated as T in the exchanges). That followed a number of Dotcom’s messages urging the cable news host to push for the arrangement.

“Remind T about the art of the deal,” one of them read.

“I have discussed it [the Assange deal] with him many times,” Hannity responded.



The tweets came after Rohrabacher released a **press statement** confirming he had indeed made an informal quid-pro-quo proposition to Assange, but denied

he had been sent on Trump's instructions.

“At no time did I talk to President Trump about Julian Assange,” Rohrabacher said.

“Likewise, I was not directed by Trump or anyone else connected with him to meet with Julian Assange. I was on my own fact-finding mission at personal expense to find out information I thought was important to our country.”

“When speaking with Assange,” he later added, “I told him that if he could provide me information and evidence about who actually gave him the DNC emails, I would then call on President Trump to pardon him.”

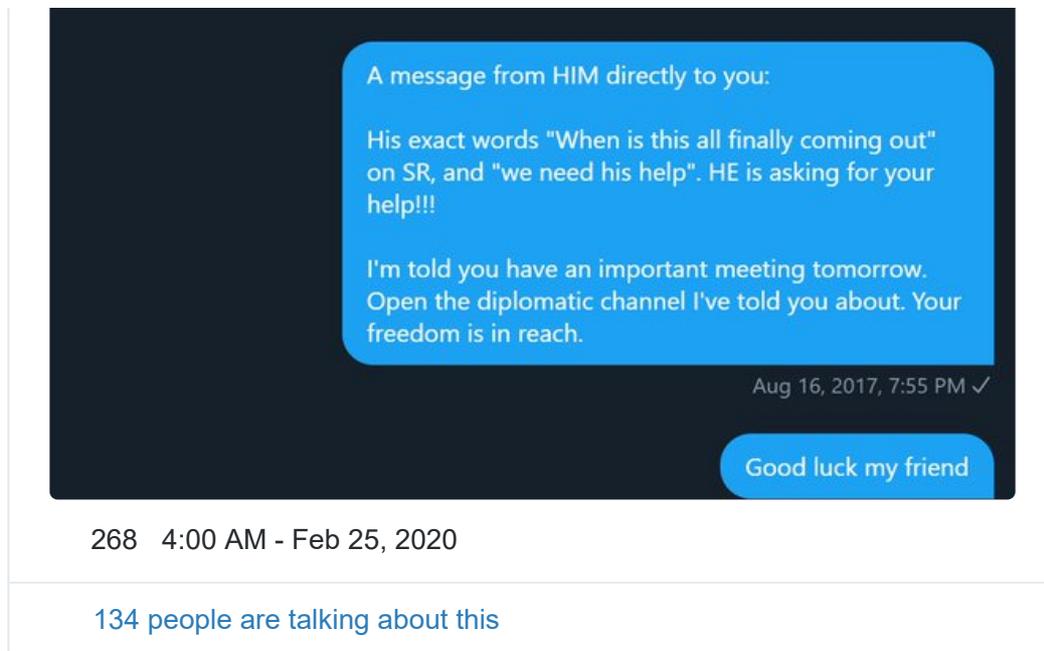
White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham also **dismissed the notion** of a Trump-endorsed pardon offer, calling the claim “absolutely and completely false.” She added that Trump “barely knows” Rohrabacher and had “never spoken to him on this subject.” This denial came despite their earlier phone call between the two and a 45-minute meeting at the White House attended by former chief of staff Reince Priebus and former chief strategist Steve Bannon.

The messages released by Dotcom reveal a different version of events than those expressed by Rohrabacher and the White House, however. In a further screenshot, this time between him and Assange, the interactions showed Trump had first-hand knowledge of the pardon agreement.



Kim Dotcom
@KimDotcom

Just before the meeting between Julian Assange and Rep. Dana Rohrabacher I told Julian to expect an offer to secure his freedom and encouraged him to take it. I did this because I knew what Trump/Rohrabacher would offer through my back-channel. I was involved in making it happen.



The message came one day after the Rohrabacher meeting where Assange refused to reveal his source. Accordingly, Trump’s patience was tested.

“When is this all finally coming out,” Trump said of Rich according to the screen shots. Assange, however, maintained his position.

In turn, Trump took his vengeance. Because not only would the admission that Rich — a DNC staffer who was **murdered in Washington D.C.** — discredit the unsubstantiated Russia allegations that swirled at the time of the Democrat-led Mueller investigation, the information could have provided useful ammunition for the upcoming election.

“I have no need to do anyone favours,” Assange said in response to Trump’s request. He was then charged with **18 espionage-linked indictments** after refusing to supply the evidence.

And if the texts alone were insufficient to show the political nature of the persecution of Assange, Dotcom’s screen-grabs were then quickly followed by another set of damning revelations: Cassandra Fairbanks, a Conservative journalist and confidant of Assange’s, **leaked audio recordings** from calls between her and Arthur Schwartz, a middle-aged political consultant known as Donald Trump Jr.’s “fixer”.

The first phone call of note came after Fairbanks visited Assange in October 2018 and after she penned a now-deleted article on the persecuted journalist. In it, Fairbanks had interviewed Assange’s mother, Christine Assange, and had hoped to raise sympathy among Conservative circles.

Instead, after the article was shared in a group message with Schwartz and his boss, Rick Grenell — the former U.S. Ambassador to Germany and Trump’s new Director of National Intelligence — Fairbanks received a phone call from the Trump operative that she **described** as “insane”.

“A little bit after I published this article,” Fairbanks said, “I posted it in the group hoping that someone would see it and maybe they would feel bad or would maybe be moved to share it with people who could make a difference...

“... About ten minutes later, I got this insane phone call and it was Arthur Schwartz and he was completely erratic. He was saying that I needed to stop trying, that a deal had already been made to arrest Julian, that they were going to go in the embassy to get him.”

According to Fairbanks, Schwartz went on to repeat the **false allegations** that Assange’s disclosures had led to harm and to the torture of U.S. military informants, even asking the then 33-year-old mother how she would feel if her young daughter was subject to the same circumstances.

“I took it as very threatening,” she continued. “He was threatening my reputation. Some of it, I perceived, as even more sinister than that.”

She then began recording her calls — and what took place after was most revealing.

After Fairbanks maintained her support of Assange, visiting him once again in January and March 2019, she asked Schwartz why she was subjected to greater levels of monitoring in the embassy. It was then she received the second of two recorded phone calls.



Cassandra Fairbanks

@CassandraRules



The phone call. pscp.tv/w/cSWdxDI4OTU4...



It came after Schwartz had previously told Fairbanks that the U.S. State Department was aware she had told Assange about the plans to arrest him and that they had launched an investigation into how she received the information.

“Someone’s going to go to jail,” Schwartz said. “You need to stop this. I don’t want to go to jail!”

The phone call also came after Fairbanks tweeted about the subject, telling Conservatives supportive of Wikileaks to be careful of Grenell given that he had been instrumental in crafting assurances to the Ecuadorian government that Assange would not be given the death sentence if British forces were invited into the embassy to arrest him. The deal was first reported by [ABC News](#) and was later mentioned in Fairbanks’ reporting.

“They [the State Department] look at you and they see that we speak,” Schwartz continued. “That’s bad!

“Rick [Grenell] is taking order from the president! You’re going to punish me because he took orders from the president?”

The revelations, both of Fairbanks and Dotcom, are significant because they give further weight to [arguments made by Assange’s lawyers](#) at the opening of his extradition hearings last week.

They said Assange’s indictment was “clearly” political, arguing his extradition should be barred based on article 4(1) of the U.S.-U.K. extradition treaty. The article forbids both parties from handing over prisoners for political offences.

The extradition hearings will continue on May 18 and will include further details of Fairbanks’ evidence. Jennifer Robinson, an Assange barrister from Doughty Street Chambers in London, will also submit a written statement from Assange’s meeting with Rohrabacher.

Further information about the nature of the evidence is expected to be made public at a case-management hearing at Belmarsh Magistrates' Court on April 7.

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