

Mexico President to Raise Assange Case in July Meeting with Biden

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*When Mexico **President Andrés Manuel López Obrador** meets with United States **President Joe Biden** on July 12, he plans to once again urge the US government to drop the charges against WikiLeaks founder **Julian Assange**.*

Obrador is one of the few presidents in the world, who has expressed genuine support for Assange and even offered to engage in talks about asylum in Mexico.

“If they take him to the United States and he is sentenced to the maximum penalty and to die in prison, we must start a campaign to tear down the Statue of Liberty,” Obrador [said](#), as he referred to Assange during a [press conference](#) on July 4.

According to El País, Obrador insisted that the Statue of Liberty would “no longer be a symbol of freedom” if Assange was extradited. He maintained there could be “no silence” on the matter.

The UK government [authorized](#) Assange’s extradition on June 17. Assange’s legal team appealed the decision.

While it is a welcome development that an ally and neighboring country is challenging the US to uphold press freedom, the remarks from Obrador apparently came while deflecting [criticism](#) of Mexico from Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Mexico is one of the more dangerous countries in Latin America for journalists. RSF, which also supports Assange, condemned Mexico after “Yesenia Mollinedo, the founder and editor of the Facebook news outlet El Veraz, and Sheila Johana García, a video reporter for El Veraz,” were “gunned down in broad daylight in Cosoleacaque, in the eastern state of Veracruz.”

“[RSF] is appalled by the murders of three more reporters in less than a week in Mexico,

which—subject to confirmation by RSF’s investigations—will bring the total number of Mexican journalists killed in connection with their work since the start of the year to 11,” the press freedom organization declared.

With no evidence, Obrador suggested RSF’s statement was part of a “smear campaign against the government of Mexico.”

But Obrador is not alone when it comes to invoking the Assange case to deflect responsibility. Several leaders throughout the world, including in China, Russia, and Azerbaijan, have responded to Western criticism of how their governments treat journalists by asking how the US and United Kingdom can claim to support press freedom when Assange is in jail.

Additionally, supporting Assange is a way for the Mexico government to assert its independence and breakaway from a history of US meddling and destabilization in Latin America. After all, this is partly why Ecuador President Rafael Correa granted political asylum to Assange in 2012 and allowed the WikiLeaks founder to live in the country’s London embassy.

Obrador is recognized as Mexico’s first left-wing president in decades.

In the last week of June, Obrador contended that Assange is the “best journalist of our time, in the world. And he has been, I repeat, very unjustly treated, worse than a criminal. That is a shame for the world.” He added, “Mexico opens its doors to Assange.”

Obrador, as Ben Norton [recounted](#) for Multipolarista, paused during this press conference to show a clip from the “Collateral Murder” video, which was released by US Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning to WikiLeaks. The video showed a 2007 Apache helicopter attack by US soldiers in Baghdad. The troops killed two Reuters journalists and a father who stopped his van to provide aid.

The Mexico leader took a firm stand in June and refused to attend the Summit of the Americas, which was hosted by the US State Department in Los Angeles. He boycotted the summit because the leaders of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua were barred.

Obrador’s boycott inspired the leaders of Bolivia, Guatemala, and Honduras to join Mexico in giving the US government the cold shoulder. It effectively ensured the so-called democracy summit was sparsely attended and would be an entirely inconsequential gathering for all involved.

To deal with the fallout, US officials invited Obrador to the White House.

One of the earliest statements of support from Obrador came on January 3, 2020. He [highlighted](#) the US diplomatic cables that Assange published, which also came from Manning.

“I don’t know if he has recognized that he acted against rules and norms of a political system, but at the time these cables demonstrated how the world system functions in its authoritarian nature,” Lopez Obrador said. “Hopefully consideration will be given to this, and he’s released and won’t continue to be tortured.”

Obrador asked President Donald Trump to [pardon](#) Assange, but Trump was too concerned

with whether senators in the Republican Party would vote to impeach him. He declined to issue a pardon.

On January 4, 2021, Obrador [cheered](#) the initial decision by a UK district court to block Assange's extradition. He also offered asylum.

The Crown Prosecution Service ruthlessly used Obrador's asylum offer to keep Assange in jail.

Clair Dobbin QC, a prosecutor, claimed Assange had a history of attempts to evade extradition. He was willing to live in the Ecuador embassy and might "flee" to the Mexico embassy if he believed the US government would ultimately win their appeal, she argued.

The tactic helped to persuade **District Judge Vanessa Baraitser**. Bail was denied two days after ruling that incarceration in the United States would lead Assange to act upon a single-minded determination to take his own life, an impulse he could not control.

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Featured image: Screen shot of Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador from MILENIO broadcast of press conference on July 4, 2022 ([Source](#))

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