

Minister ‘Misled Parliament’ on Foreign Office Role in Secret Assange Operation

New information suggests the UK government may be covering up the extent of its involvement in the arrest and incarceration of the WikiLeaks founder.

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A British MP has accused a Foreign Office minister of “misleading parliament” over his department’s involvement in the secret operation to arrest Julian Assange.

Kenny MacAskill MP, a former Scottish justice secretary, [asked](#) the Foreign Office “whether any people working on Operation Pelican were based within [its] Department’s premises.”

Pelican was the secret Metropolitan Police-led operation to seize Assange from his asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, which was mounted in April 2019.

Junior foreign minister David Rutley [told parliament](#) last week in answer:

“No Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCDO] officials were directly assigned to work on Operation Pelican.”

However, in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOI) request in July last year, the Foreign Office had already admitted:

“Three FCDO officials did some work on Operation Pelican, the most senior of which was Head of Latin America Department.”

Declassified on Tuesday [revealed](#) the UK government had assigned 15 staff to Pelican, but this number did not include any Foreign Office personnel.

‘Misled parliament’

Under the [Ministerial Code](#), ministers have a duty to “be as open as possible with parliament” and to “give accurate and truthful information”. A House of Commons guide

[states](#) that “this requirement governs the answers ministers provide to parliamentary questions”.

The misleading of parliament is a serious charge that can lead to a minister’s resignation or sacking.

David Rutley, the Conservative MP for Macclesfield, has been foreign minister for the Americas and Caribbean since [October 2022](#), and serves under foreign secretary James Cleverly.

A supporter of Rishi Sunak, Rutley has [met](#) the US ambassador to Britain and travelled to Colombia and Panama since taking up office.

Kenny MacAskill, MP for East Lothian, told *Declassified*:

“This new information shows that foreign minister David Rutley misled parliament in answering my recent question. It demonstrates not just the standard obfuscation I have become used to, but actual distortion of the facts about the UK government’s effort to ‘get’ Julian Assange.”

He added:

“The actions of the British government have not simply been to assist the US. They have been active and willing participants in the state-sponsored cruelty meted out to Assange. And then tried to hide it all.”

18 officials

Operation Pelican’s existence was only [revealed](#) in the memoirs of former foreign minister Sir Alan Duncan which were [published](#) last year. The UK government routinely blocks, or obfuscates its answers to, information requests about the Assange case.

For instance, the Home Office and the Cabinet Office have refused FOI requests regarding communication between departments about Pelican. The Foreign Office claimed it holds no information on the matter.

In March, Home Office minister Kit Malthouse even [told](#) parliament that his department, despite having eight staff assigned to Pelican, holds no information about which other ministries were involved.

Then, in a later response to a FOI request, the Home Office refused to confirm or deny whether it holds information on inter-departmental communication about Pelican. This refusal to rule out whether the Home Office does hold information on the matter raises concerns that Malthouse may also have earlier misled parliament.

The new information takes up to 18 the number of officials the UK government has admitted to deploying on Operation Pelican.

These included senior officials such as the Deputy National Security Advisor at the Cabinet Office and the International Director at the Home Office, according to documents obtained by *Declassified* through a FOI request.

Declassified has [revealed](#) that four of Britain's most powerful government ministries, including the Foreign Office, are refusing to say if their officials have met with US authorities to discuss Julian Assange.

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Featured image: Police ejecting Julian Assange from Ecuadorian embassy in London, April 11, 2019. (Screenshot from a YouTube video)

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