WASHINGTON, D.C. - On March 14, 2022, the United Kingdom’s Supreme Court denied Julian Assange permission to appeal his extradition. “This is an appalling decision. Assange faces grave human rights abuses in the US,” said Defending Rights & Dissent policy director Chip Gibbons. “His prosecution itself is an attack on the human rights of free expression and press freedom. As lamentable as today’s decision is, the UK courts shouldn’t have had to weigh the decision to extradite Assange, because the US government shouldn’t have indicted Assange in the first place. President Biden or Attorney General Merrick Garland could end this travesty today by either dropping the charges against Assange or pardoning him.”

The US has brought 18 counts against Julian Assange, 17 of them under the Espionage Act. All of the charges pertain to WikiLeaks 2010-2011 role in publishing leaked information about the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the actions of the State Department. Newspapers around the world, including the New York Times, The Guardian, and Le Monde, published this same information.

Nearly every single press freedom group, including Defending Rights & Dissent, opposes the US government’s prosecution of Julian Assange. If successful it will set a precedent that allows journalists to be prosecuted for publishing classified information.

In January 2021, a UK district judge blocked Assange’s extradition to the US not on press freedom grounds, but on the basis that US prison conditions were likely to be oppressive to Assange’s mental health. After the court had already taken evidence and reached a decision, the US issued “assurances” about Assange’s potential treatment in US custody.

Gibbons wrote an extensive piece for Jacobin in which he compared the US’s assurance to international standards for the treatment of prisoners, interviewed formerly incarcerated whistleblowers, and human rights attorneys. He concluded that if Assange was extradited to the US he will face serious human rights abuses in US custody. He has also interviewed for our Primary Sources podcast the then-UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, on his findings that Assange was the victim of psychological torture.

Nonetheless, the High Court overturned the judge’s decision last December. With the Supreme Court saying Assange’s appeal does not raise a “point of law,” the decision is headed to the UK Home Secretary who will make a decision on whether to grant extradition.
The Biden Administration, however, should withdraw its request for extradition and drop all charges against Assange.

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**Defending Rights & Dissent** fights to fulfill the promise of the Bill of Rights for everyone. DRAD was created in 2015 out of the merger of two envelope-pushing organizations: the Bill of Rights Defense Committee (BORDC) and the Defending Dissent Foundation (DDF). BORDC was founded in 2001, following the introduction of the PATRIOT Act, and coordinated the successful passage of resolutions opposing government spying in over 400 cities and towns across the country, as well as eight states, reflecting a transpartisan populist consensus in favor of liberty and privacy. DDF was founded in 1960 to fight the McCarthy-era witch hunt that targeted law-abiding Americans on the basis of their political beliefs.