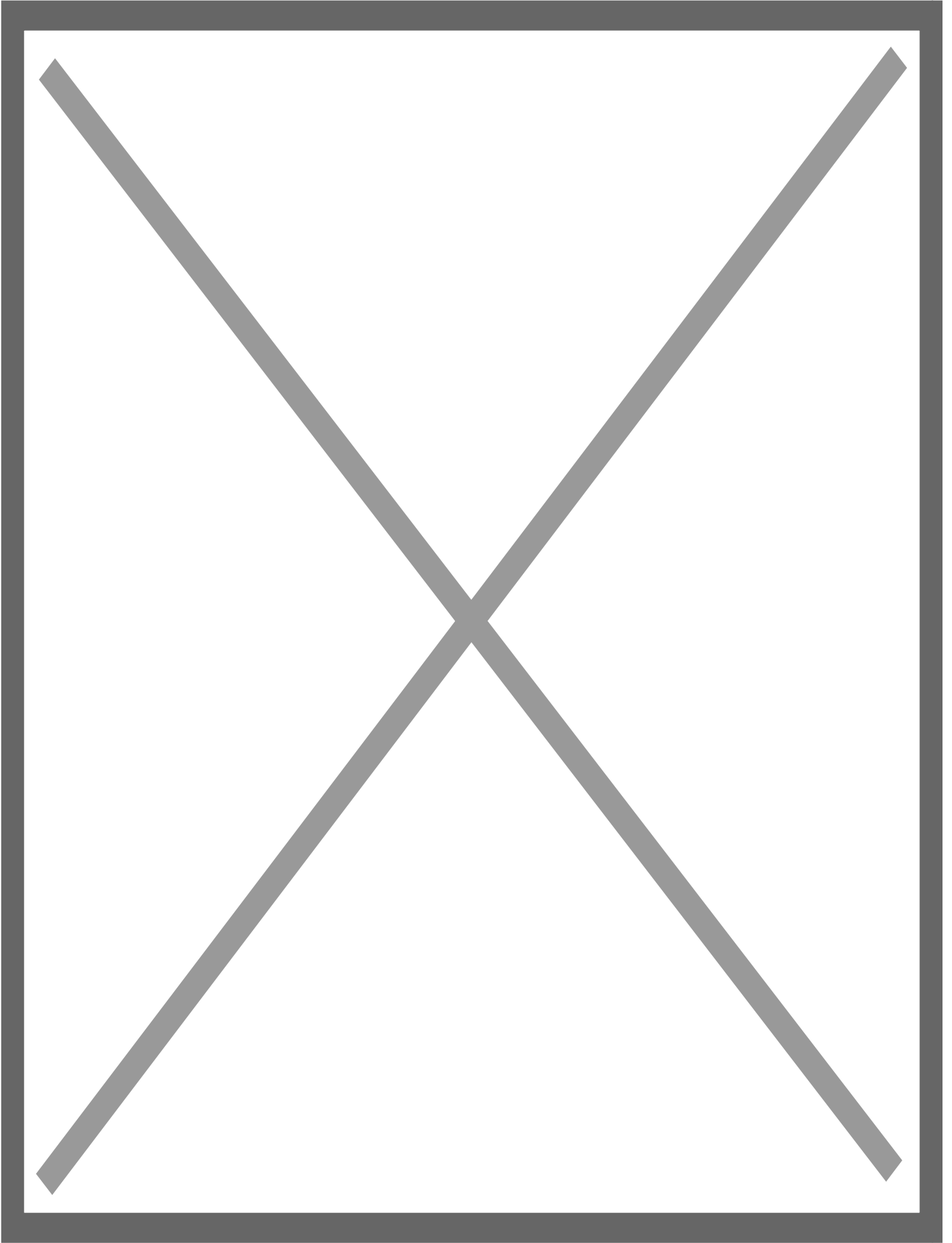


*Biden says he is considering
Australia's request to drop
charges against Julian Assange*

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Washington, April 10 (RHC)-- U.S. President Joe Biden on Wednesday said that he is "considering" a request from Australia for the United States to end the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. "We're considering it," Biden said in response to a shouted question by a reporter during a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House.

Julian Assange was indicted on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse over WikiLeaks' publication of classified U.S. files. American prosecutors claim that he endangered lives when he aided U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning in obtaining diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks published.

The Justice Department declined to comment on Biden's remarks.

Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison for giving classified information to WikiLeaks, but then-President Barack Obama commuted her sentence after seven years. She was later jailed for refusing to cooperate with grand juries investigating the documents.

Julian Assange, an Australian citizen, has been engaged in a battle against U.S. extradition efforts from prison in the United Kingdom for more than a decade. He spent seven years in self-exile in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and the last five years in the high-security Belmarsh Prison on the outskirts of the British capital.

Last month, the High Court in London granted Assange a temporary reprieve from extradition to the U.S. on espionage charges, allowing him to take his challenge to a new hearing.

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