

Verdict

Prince's standing diminished

Maxwell verdict bodes ill for Andrew civil case

LONDON, Jan 2, (AP) — Prince Andrew wasn't on trial in the Ghislaine Maxwell sex trafficking case, but her conviction is bad news for the man who is ninth in line to the British throne.

With the conclusion of the Maxwell case, attention will now turn to a US civil suit in which the plaintiff alleges Maxwell and long-time boyfriend Jeffrey Epstein took her to London, New York and the US Virgin Islands to have sex with Andrew when she was underage.

Andrew denies the allegations, but Wednesday's verdict shows that at least one American jury was willing to believe the young women trafficked by Epstein and Maxwell in a criminal case, where the standard of proof is higher than in civil cases.



Prince Andrew

"To the extent there's overlap of evidence with respect to Prince Andrew's case, it certainly doesn't bode well," said Bradley Simon, a former US federal prosecutor who now works as a defense attorney in complex civil cases. "But, as I said, every case hinges on its own specific facts and the judges will always instruct the jury on that."

Maxwell was convicted Wednesday of sex trafficking and conspiracy charges after a month long trial in New York.

While US criminal cases must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt, civil defendants can be ordered to pay financial damages if they are found responsible based on a preponderance of the evidence.

The verdict is problematic for Andrew because he has long been friends with Maxwell, daughter of the late rags-to-riches media tycoon Robert Maxwell. Even after Epstein was charged with sex crimes, Andrew failed to distance himself from her. Those links have already diminished the prince's standing.

Disatros

Andrew was forced to give up his duties as a working member of the royal family after a disastrous 2019 interview with the BBC that only increased public concern about his ties to Epstein and Maxwell. The prince was widely criticized for his explanation of why he maintained contact with Epstein after the financier was accused of sexual misconduct and for failing to show empathy for Epstein's victims.

Although the Maxwell trial didn't offer any sensational new allegations about Andrew, it once again reminds people about the sordid allegations and weakens his standing with the public, said Chris Scott of Slateford, a London law firm that specializes in reputational issues.

"It just adds credibility to the accounts of people," Scott told The Associated Press. "You have a criminal court finding now in the US supporting that there was the trafficking going on. In a sense, it becomes much harder for people to run the angle that this is all made up when you do have that credibility building up. So I think that that will be very problematic for him."

The civil suit against Andrew was filed last August by Virginia Giuffre, who says she was 17 when she was flown to London to have sex with Andrew at Maxwell's house in Belgravia, an upscale neighborhood that is home to many foreign embassies and wealthy expatriates. Other encounters with Andrew occurred at Epstein's homes in Manhattan and the US Virgin Islands, according to her lawsuit.

Giuffre, who wasn't part of the criminal case, has described Maxwell as a "Mary Poppins" figure who made young girls feel comfortable as they were lured into Epstein's web.

It was at Maxwell's home in London that a photo of Andrew with his arm around Giuffre's waist is alleged to have been taken - an image that has long been central to Giuffre's allegations. In the BBC interview, Andrew suggested the image had been faked.

"I have no recollection of ever meeting this lady," he said. "None whatsoever."

Given the high stakes for Andrew, one question surrounding the civil suit is whether it will ever get to trial. Gloria Allred, who represents a number of Epstein's victims, told the BBC she expects the prince's attorneys to file a series of procedural challenges to try to derail the case.

This strategy has already been on display.

Andrew initially denied that he had been legally served with court papers notifying him of the lawsuit. Then in October, his lawyers asked Judge Lewis A. Kaplan to throw out the suit, saying the prince never sexually abused Giuffre and that they believed she sued Andrew "to achieve another payday at his expense and at the expense of those closest to him." Last week, they mounted another challenge, arguing that Giuffre's lawsuit should be thrown out because she no longer lives in the US.

Andrew met Maxwell while she was studying history at the University of Oxford in the early 1980s.

Like her formidable and well-connected father, Ghislaine Maxwell became a master networker, building a long list of contacts in the world of wealth and power in which she grew up.

Empire

After graduating, she worked for the family publishing empire in a variety of roles. In 1991, at the age of 29, she became her father's US emissary after he bought the New York Daily News amid efforts to compete with fellow media tycoon - and New York Post owner - Rupert Murdoch.

Robert Maxwell died later that year when he fell off his yacht - the Lady Ghislaine - in the Canary Islands, an event some saw as an accident and others a suicide. Investors soon discovered that his wealth was an illusion: Maxwell had diverted hundreds of millions of pounds from his companies' pension funds to prop up his publishing empire.

Soon after her father's death, Ghislaine Maxwell was photographed sitting next to Epstein during a memorial event at the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan.

Maxwell brought star power to her relationship with Epstein, and the two were soon attending parties with the likes of Bill Clinton and Donald Trump. Andrew would later invite Maxwell and Epstein to Windsor Castle and Sandringham, Queen Elizabeth II's country estate.

Ian Maxwell said Thursday that the family still believes his sister is innocent and will support efforts to appeal her conviction.

"We are very disappointed with the verdict," the family said in a statement on Wednesday. "We have already started the appeal tonight, and we believe that she will ultimately be vindicated."

Andrew has in recent years sought to distance himself from Epstein, who killed himself in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

Andrew told the BBC that he saw Epstein a maximum three times a year and sometimes stayed at one of his homes when he was in the US.

The prince said he stopped meeting with Epstein in 2006 after he became aware of a sexual abuse investigation that eventually led to the financier serving 13 months in jail. Andrew said he had one last meeting with Epstein in December 2010 to tell him they couldn't remain in contact.

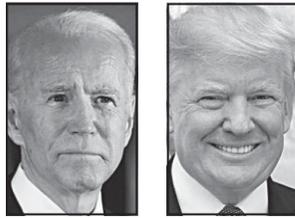


House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., joined from left by House Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind., Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., Minority Whip Steve Scalise, R-La., Rep. Kelly Armstrong, R-N.D., and Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, holds a news conference before the start of a hearing by a select committee appointed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on the Jan. 6 insurrection, at the Capitol in Washington, on July 27, 2021. (AP)

Riot



Karen Robledo, 10, of Atlanta, laughs at the snow on her eyelashes while sledding at a popular sledding hill near the Iowa Capitol Building in Des Moines, Iowa, on Jan. 1. (AP)



Biden

Trump

America

Storms damage US South: A line of severe storms damaged homes, knocked out power and downed trees in parts of the southern United States late Saturday into Sunday morning.

Authorities closed roads in Hazel Green, Alabama, after power lines came down and homes suffered damage. The Madison County Sheriff's Office shared photos online including one of a snapped power pole.

The weather also caused damage to businesses in Hazel Green, including a Walmart, local news outlets reported. The community is located about 15 miles (24 kilometers) north of Huntsville.

The same system brought down trees in the nearby town of Triana, roughly 20 miles (32 kilometers) southwest of Huntsville. Mayor Mary Caudle told WAFF-TV that about 280 residents took cover in a storm shelter Saturday night.

The storms followed a system earlier Saturday which brought a possible tornado and flooding to parts of Kentucky. (AP)

Judge blocks job mandate: President Joe Biden cannot require teachers in the Head Start early education program to be vaccinated against COVID-19, a Louisiana federal judge ruled Saturday, handing a victory to 24 states that had sued the federal government.

U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty wrote that the Biden administration unlawfully bypassed Congress when ordering that workers in Head Start programs be vaccinated by Jan. 31 and that students 2 years or older be masked when indoors or when in close contact outdoors.

Head Start is a federally funded program that promotes education for children under the age of 6 who are from low-income families.

Doughty, an appointee of then-President Donald Trump, wrote that the separation of powers is crucial to the country's founding and quoted former President Ronald Reagan, who said "the nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'" (AP)

3 dead, 4 hurt in shooting: Three people were killed and four others were wounded after several people at a Mississippi party started shooting just minutes before the end of 2021, authorities said.

No arrests have been made in the shooting at a Gulfport New Year's party in part because investigators are piecing together a chaotic scene where more than 50 bullets were fired from several guns but also because the people who saw the shooting and some of the wounded aren't talking to officers, Gulfport Police Chief Chris Ryle said.

"I understand their mentality. They don't want to be seen as snitches in public. But we have a phone line they are more

Judges hearing litany of excuses

Rioters' tears don't spare them from jail

WASHINGTON, Jan 2, (AP) — Florida business owner Robert Palmer cheered on the violence at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 before he joined the fray. Screaming obscenities, he hurled a wooden plank and a fire extinguisher at police officers trying to ward off the mob.

Nearly a year later, Palmer fought back tears when he faced the federal judge who sentenced him to more than five years in prison. He said he was "horrified, absolutely devastated" by what he had done.

"I'm just so ashamed that I was a part of that," Palmer told U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan on Dec. 17 before she gave him the longest prison term for any rioter so far.

Judges are hearing tearful expressions of remorse - and a litany of excuses - from rioters paying a price for joining the Jan. 6 insurrection, even as others try to play down the deadly attack on a seat of American democracy.

The Justice Department's investigation of the riot has now entered the punishment phase. So far, 71 people have been sentenced for riot-related crimes. They include a company CEO, an architect, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, a gym owner, a former Houston police officer and a University of Kentucky student. Many rioters have said they lost jobs and friends after their mob of Donald Trump loyalists disrupted the certification of Joe Biden's presidential victory.

Fifty-six of the 71 pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building. Most of them were sentenced to home confinement or jail terms measured in weeks or months, according to an Associated Press tally of every sentencing. But rioters who assaulted police officers have gotten years behind bars.

With hundreds of people charged, the Justice Department has taken heat for not coming down harder on some rioters, and it has failed to charge anyone with sedition or treason despite hints early on in the investigation. But lower-level cases tend to be easier to prosecute and typically get resolved before more

complex ones.

At least 165 people have pleaded guilty so far, mostly to crimes punishable by a maximum sentence of six months. There are dozens of cases involving more serious offenses still moving through the system. More than 220 people have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement officers at the Capitol, according to the Justice Department. Since November, three of them have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from more than three years to just over five years.

More than 700 people have been charged so far and the FBI is still looking for more. Among the most serious charges are against far-right extremist group members accused of plotting attacks to obstruct Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election. Their cases haven't yet gone to trial.

The rioters' refrains before the judges are often the same: They were caught up in the moment or just following the crowd into the Capitol. They didn't see any violence or vandalism. They thought police were letting them enter the building. They insist they went there to peacefully protest.

Implode

Their excuses often implode in the face of overwhelming evidence. Thousands of hours of videos from surveillance cameras, mobile phones and police body cameras captured them reveling in the mayhem. Many boasted about their crimes on social media in the days after the deadly attack.

Judge Amy Berman Jackson said then-President Trump's incendiary speech on Jan. 6 "stoked the flames of fear and discontent." But she told Russell James Peterson, a rioter from Pennsylvania, that he "walked there on his own two feet" and must bear responsibility for his own actions.

"No one was swept away to the Capitol. No one was carried. The rioters were adults," Jackson said before sentencing Peterson to 30 days' imprisonment.

Eighteen judges, including four nominated by Trump, have sen-

tenced the 71 defendants. Thirty-one defendants have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment or to jail time already served, including 22 who received sentences of three months or less, according to the AP tally. An additional 18 defendants have been sentenced to home confinement. The remaining 22 have gotten probation without house arrest.

A seemingly genuine display of contrition before or during a sentencing hearing can help a rioter avoid a jail cell. The judges often cite remorse as a key factor in deciding sentences.

But Chutkan told Palmer that she couldn't tell if his remorse was genuine.

"I can't look into your heart or your mind," the judge said. "The way you conduct your life after this case is going to speak volumes about whether you are truly remorseful."

Dona Sue Bissey's case is one of only six in which prosecutors agreed to recommend probation without home detention. But instead, Chutkan sentenced her to 14 days in jail. The judge questioned whether Bissey, 53, of Indiana, truly was remorseful because she bragged about her participation in the riot.

"There must be consequences for taking part, even a small part, in a mass attempt to stop the certification of the presidential election and prevent the transfer of power," said Chutkan, who was nominated by President Barack Obama.

Four rioters sentenced by Chief Judge Beryl Howell received three months of home detention after prosecutors recommended jail terms. Howell, also an Obama nominee, questioned the Justice Department's "muddled approach" in resolving cases with misdemeanor pleas despite using "scorching strong language" to describe rioters' actions.

Anthony Mariotto, a Florida man who was sentenced to three years of probation and ordered to pay a \$5,000 fine, said he "got caught up in the moment" but knows he broke the law by entering the Capitol.

"I was hoping that they would just pause the election," Mariotto said during his December sentencing.

than welcome to call," Ryle said at a Saturday news conference.

One person remained in critical condition and three others who were wounded

are expected to recover, according to police, who responded to 911 calls at 11:58 p.m. Friday.

Investigators aren't sure what caused



A passenger is lowered from a Sandia Peak Tramway car that was stranded overnight on New Year's Eve on Jan. 1, 2022, in Albuquerque, N.M. A Bernalillo County Fire Department spokesman said 16 of the stranded people were rescued as of Saturday afternoon as rescue operations continued. The spokesman said those aboard the car when it got stuck at 10 p.m. Friday were all employees of the Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway or a mountaintop restaurant. (AP)

the shoving and punching that quickly led to the shooting, the police chief said.

"Guns, drugs, alcohol - it's a recipe for disaster," Ryle said.

Police aren't sure how many people were at the outdoors party when the shooting started. Officers estimated several dozen, but people were running all directions as they arrived, Ryle said. (AP)

Crews rescue 21 people: New Mexico search and rescue crews used ropes and helicopters Saturday to rescue 21 people who were stranded overnight in two tram cars after an iced-over cable caused the cars to get stuck high up in the Sandia Mountains overlooking Albuquerque.

Lt. Robert Arguillas a Bernalillo County Fire Department spokesperson, said early Saturday afternoon that crews first rescued 20 people stranded in one car and several hours later rescued a 21st person stranded by themselves in a second car.

All the people on the two cars were employees of the Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway or a mountaintop restaurant, and the 20 in one car were being ferried down to the base of the mountains at the end of their workdays, Arguillas said.

The other employee had been heading up the mountain to provide overnight security when the tram system shut down Friday night due to icing, Arguillas said.

There were no reported injuries among those stranded, Arguillas said. "More just pretty frustrated." (AP)