Biden brands WikiLeaks leader “terrorist” and criminal

Patrick Martin
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US Vice President Joseph Biden made the highest-level public attack on WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange since the organization began publishing secret US diplomatic cables, calling Assange a “high-tech terrorist” and agreeing with a suggestion that the organization’s activities are “criminal.” Biden was interviewed on the NBC program Meet the Press, broadcast Sunday morning.

“Look, this guy has done things that have damaged and put in jeopardy the lives and occupations of people in other parts of the world,” the vice president said, in response to a question from interviewer David Gregory. The leaks of US diplomatic cables have “made it more difficult for us to conduct our business with our allies and our friends,” Biden continued, adding, “There is a desire now to meet with me alone rather than have staff in the room.”

The discussion of Assange came as part of a longer interview conducted Saturday. Gregory raised the issue with a suggestion that the United States “do something to stop Mr. Assange,” a question that Biden chose to deflect. “The Justice Department is taking a look at that,” he said. “I’m not going to comment on that process.”

Biden continued, “I would argue that it’s closer to being a high-tech terrorist than the Pentagon papers.”

Gregory did not ask about the calls from right-wing media pundits and some congressmen and senators that Assange should be seized by the CIA or assassinated outright. The Obama administration has proclaimed its right to assassinate anyone, including an American citizen, that the president designates as a “terrorist,” so applying that label to Assange is equivalent to declaring him fair game for CIA hit squads.

Biden's claim that Assange has endangered the lives of US diplomats and informants is one that US government spokesmen have reiterated repeatedly in the weeks since the WikiLeaks revelations began, without ever providing a shred of evidence.

Moreover, only two days before the interview, Biden admitted that he didn’t see “any substantive damage” from the WikiLeaks exposures.

The accusations of “terrorism” add credence to the warnings made by Assange himself that his life is “under threat.” Speaking to reporters outside Ellingham Hall, the home in rural Norfolk where he is effectively under house arrest, Assange said, “There is a threat to my life. There is a threat to my staff. There are significant risks facing us.”

Assange also charged American financial corporations with practicing “business McCarthyism,” after Bank of America shut down all transactions to the WikiLeaks web site on Saturday. The bank followed the example of PayPal, MasterCard, Visa and other US-based financial institutions that have responded to US government pressure by cutting off Internet and wire transfers to WikiLeaks.

“It’s a new type of business McCarthyism in the US to deprive this organisation of the funds that it needs to survive, to deprive me personally of the funds that my lawyers need to protect me against extradition to the US or to Sweden,” Assange told Agence France Presse.

Bank of America may have had an additional reason for acting against WikiLeaks, since Assange has said the organization is in possession of data that would support a “megaleak” about a major US bank “early next year.” He told the business magazine *Forbes* that the leak would provide details of “unethical practices.”

Assange also amplified his criticism of the trumped-up sexual assault charges being pursued by Swedish prosecutors, the basis for his nine-day incarceration in Wandsworth prison on an extradition warrant.

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"The case in Sweden is a travesty in the way it has been conducted," he said. "No person should be exposed to that type of investigation or persecution. It's not performed in an open way, there are lots of underhanded dealings, giving out selected materials that we don't even have." He added that there were unconfirmed reports that at least one of the two witnesses has repudiated her role in the prosecution.

Also on Saturday, the British newspaper that has published some of the most damning US diplomatic cables, the *Guardian*, published a long and vile account of the allegations against Assange, based on what it called "unauthorized access" to "police material held in Stockholm." In other words, the newspaper chose to be a conduit for police smears against Assange.

The account, with numerous lurid details but no actual evidence, comes from the newspaper with which Assange has collaborated most closely. It was written by the same journalist, Nick Davies, who established the *Guardian*'s connection to WikiLeaks.

Nothing in the long article controverts Assange's repeated declarations that his relations with both women were consensual. The article also confirms that the two women did not go to the police to complain of rape, but rather to compel Assange to have an HIV test. After Assange agreed to the test, it was the Swedish police who took the initiative to transform the case into an allegation of sexual assault.

According to a statement by one of Assange's lawyers in Britain, "his Swedish lawyer has been shown evidence of their text messages which indicate that they were concerned to obtain money by going to a tabloid newspaper and were motivated by other matters including a desire for revenge."

In point of fact, however, no charge has actually been made. Assange was jailed on an extradition warrant from Swedish prosecutors seeking to question him after he left the country. Assange repeatedly offered his testimony before leaving Sweden, with permission, to attend to WikiLeaks business in London.

Vaughan Smith, who is Assange's Norfolk host, told the *Independent* newspaper that the *Guardian* article appeared to be politically motivated. "I don't think it delivers any new revelations," he said. "I'm sad to read it. The article was critical and I wondered to what extent the *Guardian* maintains a level of criticism politically to keep off the flak of publishing the leaks. I wonder how much of this is politics. It hasn't made me think that Julian is guilty but it makes me think, perhaps, newspapers feel the need to put in criticism."

Meanwhile, on Friday, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard was compelled to retract her declaration that Assange and WikiLeaks were "illegal," admitting that after consulting with federal police, "The advice is that there have been no breaches of Australian law."

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