

Guardian editor says newspaper forced to destroy hard drives

Thomas Gaist
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In a comment published Monday, *Guardian* editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger wrote that he and other *Guardian* journalists were faced with unofficial threats of legal action by the British government, and therefore were forced to destroy hard drives containing material from whistle blower Edward Snowden.

The revelation came in the aftermath of the detention of David Miranda, the partner of *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald, by British authorities in a blatant act of political intimidation. (See, “Detention of Glenn Greenwald’s partner approved at highest levels of US and UK governments”)

The British government acted swiftly to suppress exposures of its criminal activities and the activities of its US partners. One day after the first article was published in the *Guardian* on NSA surveillance, the UK government issued a Defence Advisory Notice to the newspaper, warning that future such articles might threaten “national security” and “UK personnel.”

Rusbridger writes that two months ago he was contacted by “a very senior government official claiming to represent the views of the prime minister” about the Snowden material, which, as Rusbridger learned through a series of subsequent meetings with government agents, the state wanted to be destroyed or handed over. Rusbridger says he was told by an official, “You’ve had your fun. Now we want the stuff back.”

According to Rusbridger, “two GCHQ security experts” oversaw the destruction of hard drives containing material from Snowden in the basement of the newspaper’s office. The government agents supervised and reportedly cracked jokes as the journalists “swept up the remains of a MacBook Pro,” after using drills and grinders to smash memory chips containing encrypted files.

Rusbridger says that there are other copies of the destroyed files and that the *Guardian* will continue to report on the surveillance from America and Brazil.

“We were faced with an ultimatum by the British government that if we didn’t hand back or destroy it, they would move to law,” Rusbridger added in an interview with the *Guardian*.

Rusbridger wrote in his comment, “The state that is building such a formidable apparatus of surveillance will do its best to prevent journalists from reporting on it. Most journalists can see that. But I wonder how many have truly understood the absolute threat to journalism implicit in the idea of total surveillance, when or if it comes—and, increasingly, it looks like ‘when.’”

The editor added, “I think what Snowden is trying to draw attention to is the degree to which we are on a road to total surveillance. In these documents there is the stated ambition to scoop up everything, to store it all, and to master the Internet, this is the language that is being used internally, and Snowden waved a big red flag.”

Asked during in an interview with *World at One* whether his team of journalists has held back from publishing anything about GCHQ and UK security services because of “worries about national security,” Rusbridger said “Yes, we’ve held back a great deal, we’ve published a small amount of what we have read.”



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