

# Julian Assange and the degraded spectacle of Britain's *Guardian*

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30 May 2019

The levelling of 17 charges against Julian Assange by the United States under the Espionage Act stands as a condemnation of the near decade-long witch-hunt led by Britain's *Guardian* against the WikiLeaks founder.

For years the *Guardian* portrayed Assange as a self-promoting egotist who exaggerated the dangers he faced from the US. The measures enacted against Assange not only confirm his every warning but represent a direct threat to the *Guardian* and its staff.

The *Guardian* was one of five newspapers that Assange worked with in 2010, in publishing the Afghanistan and Iraq war logs and thousands of US diplomatic cables. These were leaked to Assange by Chelsea Manning and are now the subject of a total of 18 charges, carrying a collective maximum sentence of 175 years in prison. If Assange is prosecuted and found guilty, then the *Guardian*, its editor and many others could face the same danger.

The news of the Espionage Act charges being levelled against Assange prompted the *Guardian* to issue a disgraceful editorial with a headline summarising its main content: "The Guardian view on Julian Assange: send him to Sweden."

It stated of the Espionage Act charges, "[W]hether or not the documents should have been published, their publication should not be punished by the American justice system, which could impose a cumulative sentence of 180 years on the latest charges."

The editorial has just six paragraphs, with the last two setting out the *Guardian*'s aim: It concluded, "Then there is the rape charge that Mr Assange faced in Sweden and which led him to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in the first place. This is serious and deserves a proper trial, which will never happen if he is sent to America.

"Ultimately, the decision on his future will lie with

the home secretary, who may well still be Sajid Javid by the time it must be made. Mr Javid should defend the principle at stake and send Mr Assange to Sweden at the end of his sentence here."

What does this amount to? Let's be done with Assange and get him off our backs for good by sending him to Stockholm.

Under conditions in which the WikiLeaks journalist is facing life in prison or worse, with a Grand Jury panel in the US ready to add more charges to the indictment, which could carry the death penalty, the *Guardian* cannot bring itself to defend him.

The editorial was followed by an op-ed piece published by Alan Rusbridger on May 26. Rusbridger was the *Guardian*'s editor when it published the material provided by Assange. The message was that the "untrustworthy and dislikable" Assange still had to be defended as he is being persecuted for simply carrying out journalism.

Rusbridger, who makes no reference to Sweden, warns his colleagues, "Assange is a problematic figure in many ways. But the attempt to lock him up under the Espionage Act is a deeply troubling move that should serve as a wake-up call to all journalists. You may not like Assange, but you're next."

The *Guardian* is blinded by political hatred of Assange. Both the editorial and Rusbridger's piece assume to take the moral high ground by stating that WikiLeaks issued leaks unredacted, in contrast with their own "responsible" journalism. It states, "The Guardian disapproved of the mass publication of unredacted documents...and broke with Mr Assange over the issue."

However, as WikiLeaks pointed out in relation to the stash of classified diplomatic cables it gave to the *Guardian*, the editorial "conveniently leaves out" that it

was the newspaper itself—through a book authored by its journalists David Leigh and Luke Harding—that disclosed the password to the digital file Assange had given them in confidence.

As the investigative journalist John Pilger noted, after Leigh and Harding “turned on their source, abused him and disclosed the secret password,” their “hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie” with “not a penny going to Julian Assange or to WikiLeaks.”

It has never been proven that a single publication by WikiLeaks has ever placed anyone in harm’s way. But if Assange’s “crime” is supposedly to have published material in an unredacted form, then it is the *Guardian*, including Rusbridger, Leigh and Harding, that should be in the dock.

The only people arguing for Assange to be indicted on such a basis are the worst political scoundrels.

The entire *Guardian* editorial is based on a pack of lies and slander. Assange has never been charged with rape, and the *Guardian* knows it.

Despite its previous unrelenting character assassination of Assange, the *Guardian*, editorially, has usually been careful to note that he has only ever faced *allegations* of sexual misconduct.

On April 11, in its last editorial published on Assange—on the day that he was illegally dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London by the Metropolitan Police—the *Guardian* wrote, “He entered the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he faced *allegations* of rape and molestation (which he denies), citing fears that Stockholm would hand him to the US.” [our emphasis]

This has now been dropped as the *Guardian* witchfinders scream “Send him to Sweden,” with a strapline reading, “The founder of WikiLeaks faces charges of espionage in the US and rape in Sweden. He should stand trial for rape.”

On May 27, after being contacted by Emmy Butlin, a representative of the Julian Assange Defence Committee, and no doubt others, who stated that the *Guardian* had no right to publish such lies, the newspaper issued a corrective now tagged onto the end of its editorial: “This article was amended on 27 May 2019: to omit a misinterpretation of a remark by Chelsea Manning; and to clarify that the Swedish rape charge process is ongoing.”

The “misrepresentation” referred ~~Guardian~~ the initial statement that Chelsea Manning had “started a hunger strike” to protest being imprisoned for refusing to testify in a Grand Jury against Assange.

But on the far more important claim that Assange has been charged with rape, the *Guardian* invents an entirely new legal category of the “rape charge process.” This is linked in the body of the editorial to an August 20, 2012, article published in the Labour Party-supporting *New Statesman*. But even this scurrilous piece does not claim that Assange is *charged* with rape.

The Swedish authorities, who reopened the “investigation” against Assange after he was torn out of the Embassy against his will, have stressed that he has not been charged.

The *Guardian*’s editorial proves the extent to which it has overturned the 1921 mission statement of its former editor, C.P. Scott, published daily in its editorial pages, that “facts are sacred.”

The editorial is aimed at distancing the *Guardian* even further from Assange. It even advises, “From a US perspective, the Espionage Act is quite the wrong instrument to use against journalists or even their sources.”

“Send him to Sweden” confirms that the *Guardian* hopes to see Assange locked up for years, only without his facing charges that might threaten them, too.



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