

The Guardian's direct collusion with media censorship by secret services exposed

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Minutes of Ministry of Defence (MoD) meetings have confirmed the role of Britain's *Guardian* newspaper as a mouthpiece for the intelligence agencies.

Last week, independent journalist Matt Kennard revealed that the paper's deputy editor, Paul Johnson, was personally thanked by the Defence and Security Media Advisory Notice (or D-Notice) committee for integrating the *Guardian* into the operations of the security services.

Minutes of a meeting in 2018 read: "The Chairman thanked Paul Johnson for his service to the Committee. Paul had joined the Committee in the wake of the Snowden affair and had been instrumental in re-establishing links with the *Guardian*."

D-Notices are used by the British state to veto the publication of news damaging to its interests. The slavish collusion of the mainstream media ensures that such notices function as gag orders.

Johnson joined the committee in 2014 and evidently excelled in his performance. A separate set of minutes from the first meeting attended by Johnson records the *Guardian*'s close collaboration with military officials.

Under a section detailing "advice" given by the intelligence agencies to the media, the document reads "most of the occurrences and requests for advice were related to further publications by *The Guardian* of extracts from the Snowden documents. The Secretary reported that the engagement of DPBAC [Defence Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee] Secretariat with *The Guardian* had continued to strengthen during the last six months, with regular dialogues between the Secretary and Deputy Secretaries and *Guardian* journalists."

The secretary and deputy secretaries were Air Vice-Marshal Andrew Vallance CB OBE, Air Commodore David Adams and Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds OBE. The chairman was Peter Watkins CBE, the MoD's director general of Strategy, Security and Policy Operations.

Under the direction of these military intelligence handlers, the *Guardian* played a role in bringing other newspapers internationally to heel. The minutes note, "because of an

agreement between *The Guardian* and allied publications overseas to coordinate their respective disclosures of Snowden material, advice given to the *Guardian* has been passed on to the *New York Times* and others, helping guide the disclosures of these outlets."

In September 2014, the *Guardian* allowed the former head of GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) Sir David Omand to publish an article titled, "Edward Snowden's leaks are misguided—they risk exposing us to cyber-attacks."

He declared, "Journalists are not best placed to identify security risks; we have to trust those who oversee the intelligence-gathering."

In 2016, Paul Johnson used an unprecedented interview with a serving head of MI5, Andrew Parker, to propagandize for the antidemocratic, warmongering interests of British imperialism.

These facts are damning proof of the *Guardian*'s total integration into the propaganda wing of the MoD following its involvement in the WikiLeaks and Snowden files releases. Indeed, the work of WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange has served to expose and confirm the deep ties of the entire mainstream media to the military-intelligence complex.

The *Guardian* has been viewed historically as the voice of British liberal dissent, critical of the worst excesses of British capitalism at home and abroad. But it has always acted as a political policeman—filtering the news "responsibly" and channelling the resulting anger into impotent moral appeals to the state and other authorities. Its dealings with Assange and Snowden transformed political allegiance into direct subservience. Its liberal, critical pretensions unravelled in a matter of a few months.

When Assange looked to the *Guardian* and other papers internationally such as the *New York Times* to publish the Afghan and Iraq war logs and secret US diplomatic cables in 2010, the editors' main concern was damage control. Within a month of an initial publication of documents, the *Guardian* had broken off relations with Assange—publishing an

infamous December 17 editorial “WikiLeaks: the man and the idea.” It stated that the *Guardian* had only agreed to publish “a small number of cables” to control the political fall-out from the details of murder, torture, espionage and corruption they revealed and give it the opportunity of “editing, contextualising, explanation and redaction.”

The main purpose of the editorial was to support Assange’s extradition to Sweden on trumped-up allegations of sexual misconduct relating to a trip to that country a few months earlier.

In an op-ed piece published last month by former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger, he assumes to take the moral high ground by claiming that WikiLeaks issued leaks unredacted, and wanted to continue this practise, in contrast with his “responsible” journalism. An editorial published immediately prior to Rusbridger’s article, again supporting Assange’s extradition to Sweden to face “charges” that don’t exist, stated, “The Guardian disapproved of the mass publication of unredacted documents ... and broke with Mr. Assange over the issue.”

This is a self-serving lie. WikiLeaks has pointed out that the editorial “conveniently leaves out” that it was the *Guardian*—through a book authored by David Leigh and Luke Harding—that disclosed the password to the digital file Assange had given them in confidence. The book was a hatchet job on WikiLeaks. The rights to it were sold, becoming the basis of a slanderous Hollywood movie.

When NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked files detailing blanket state surveillance of the world’s population in 2013, the *Guardian* set out to play the same “responsible” role. Asked afterwards if the paper had held back from publishing anything about GCHQ and UK security services because of “worries about national security,” the ever-pliant Mr. Rusbridger replied, “Yes, we’ve held back a great deal, we’ve published a small amount of what we have read.”

This time, however, the *Guardian* was told by the security services that even rigorously filtering the Snowden’s revelations was not good enough. It must stop publishing immediately.

The country’s top civil servant, Cabinet Secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood, called the *Guardian*’s offices to pass on the demands of then Prime Minister David Cameron that the Snowden material either be returned to the government or destroyed. Editors were threatened with legal action if they did not comply.

Rusbridger later explained, “The tone was steely, if cordial, but there was an implicit threat that others within government and Whitehall favoured a far more draconian approach.” This is a masterpiece of understatement. Emails obtained by the Associated Press in 2014 showed that this was an operation conducted in intimate collusion between

the government, the British security services and the US National Security Agency, including then Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

In the end, two GCHQ security officials directly oversaw the *Guardian*’s destruction of its own material. Three *Guardian* staff members, including Paul Johnson himself, destroyed the hard drives in the *Guardian*’s possession with angle grinders and other equipment provided by GCHQ officials.

The *Guardian* had been put in a position it never wanted. Its liberal reputation, and previous disclosures, had made it the newspaper of choice for WikiLeaks’ and Snowden’s revelations. But the scale of what had been uncovered threatened the fundamental interests of British and US imperialism. It therefore rolled over when the government told it to cease and desist, before taking its place alongside the rest of the right-wing media on the secret committee responsible for press censorship and propaganda dissemination.

One of Assange’s persecutors-in-chief, Luke Harding, enjoys the most intimate relations with the security services. His notorious November 2018 fabrication, claiming Assange held meetings with US President Donald Trump’s former campaign manager Paul Manafort, was published in the *Guardian* just two weeks after Johnson was thanked for “re-establishing links” with the MoD. The story was widely cited and formed a keystone of the efforts, spearheaded by the Democrats in the US, to present WikiLeaks and “Russian interference” as the causes of Trump’s 2016 election victory.

Harding played a central role in silencing questions over the UK government’s bogus account of the Skripal affair in mid-2018. These events were the subject of at least one D-notice, issued while Paul Johnson was on the responsible committee.

An unintended but valuable consequence of the WikiLeaks exposures has been to explode the fraud of the *Guardian*’s claim to any critical independence from the state. The crimes of the major imperialist powers against the world’s population made available by WikiLeaks were so great that they could not be neutralised, even by the *Guardian*’s professional gatekeepers of the “truth.” Not a word published in this imperialist propaganda sheet can ever be taken at face value.



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