

# Sydney Morning Herald columnist defends Swedish frame-up of Assange

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In an opinion piece on Wednesday, Nick Miller, European correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*, mounted a desperate rearguard defence of the bogus Swedish investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, which had been dropped the day before.

Miller's argument was summed up in the headline, which declared "Assange has not been vindicated, he has merely outwaited justice."

Miller sympathetically cited the pathetic statements of the Swedish prosecutors, who claimed that witness recollections had "weakened" due to the passage of time and that there was therefore "insufficient evidence" to proceed with a "preliminary investigation"—which they had dragged-out for nine years and had already dropped twice.

The journalist repeated all of the talking points that have been used in the media to misrepresent the Swedish investigation.

Assange, Miller claimed, had "managed to stay out of the hands of the law for long enough." It was, he wrote, "a grim kind of pragmatism for this truth warrior, to deny women the right to seek justice, to have their claims tested in court, because of a legal jurisdictional gambit which itself is an attempt to avoid a trial."

Miller's article did not mention the statement of one of the women to a friend, indicating she had never intended to pursue a criminal complaint against Assange in the first place, and that it was "the police who made up the charges." Nor did he cite the finding of the initial prosecutor Eva Finne, in August 2010, who stated: "I do not think there is reason to suspect that he has committed rape." Finne dismissed the police fabrications, stating that the "conduct alleged... disclosed no crime at all."

As is now widely recognised, the allegations in Sweden were revived in 2010 due to a political decision that was inseparable from the frenzied US-led pursuit of Assange over his exposures of American war crimes and global diplomatic conspiracies.

The frame-up character of the investigation is attested to

by the litany of "irregularities" in the case. These range from the police changing one of the women's statements without informing her, to the fact that the only physical evidence in the case, a torn condom, contained no DNA, to the decision of the authorities to leak witness statements to the press in defiance of Swedish law.

The almost innumerable violations of Assange's legal and democratic rights were set out in detail in two letters sent by United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer to the Swedish government this year. The Swedish authorities were unable to respond to any of his substantive inquiries. None of this rated a mention in Miller's article.

Most perniciously, Miller's article was aimed at promoting the fraudulent claim that Assange "evaded justice" and sought to hamper the investigation.

In reality, Assange took refuge in Ecuador's London embassy in 2012, after the British judiciary took the unprecedented decision to uphold a Swedish extradition request—issued by a prosecutor, not a court—so that Assange could be asked "questions."

The Swedish authorities did not say why they needed to extradite Assange in order to interview him. Nor has it ever been explained why they refused to guarantee that they would not dispatch him to the United States if he came into their custody.

It was the prosecutors, not Assange, who sought to prevent any resolution of the investigation. For years, they refused to interview Assange in London, or via video-link. Contrary to Miller's insinuations, this is standard practice. Swedish prosecutors interviewed more than 40 individuals outside of their jurisdiction during the same period that they would not speak to Assange in London.

Prosecutors finally relented and interviewed Assange in November 2016. They dropped the case in May 2017.

Miller's suggestion that Assange needed to be in Sweden for charges to be laid is similarly false. Swedish prosecutors charged individuals in absentia of serious crimes, including murder and assault, during the same time period they did not charge Assange.

In a particularly cynical paragraph, Miller decried Assange's "more wide-eyed supporters," who "flirt with absurd, evidence-free conspiracy theories: that the women were US secret service 'honeytraps,' that the Swedish investigation was a CIA-led operation to lure Assange into a jurisdiction where he would be instantly, illegally whisked away to Virginia—or renditioned to Guantanamo, or worse."

As Miller would be aware, the Swedish authorities did in fact collaborate with the US "extraordinary rendition" program, allowing CIA operatives to kidnap individuals on their territory.

Correspondence released under Freedom of Information requests has revealed direct political interference in the case by other states, which would be inexplicable if the investigation was not a component of the British and US conspiracy against Assange.

Emails showed that the British Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) insisted in 2010 and 2011 that Swedish authorities reject Assange's offer to question him in Britain, or via video link, rather than seeking his extradition arrest. A January 2011 email from the CPS to Swedish prosecutors stated: "Please do not think that the case is being dealt with as just another extradition request."

The documents also revealed that Sweden had been considering dropping the investigation in 2013. The British CPS insisted that it continue, with one of its representatives writing: "Don't you dare get cold feet!!!" Other emails, including one from the FBI to the chief Swedish prosecutor, were deleted. Conveniently, nobody involved could remember their contents.

Not all *Sydney Morning Herald* articles, moreover, have been so dismissive of questions about the background of Anna Ardin, one of the Swedish complainants who is presented in glowing terms by Miller.

A December 2010 article in the *Herald*, headlined "Victims, jilted lovers or undercover agents," noted that "serious questions are being asked about one of Julian Assange's accusers."

The SMH article pointed out that the day after Ardin had supposedly been assaulted, she publicly tweeted that she wanted to take Assange to a "crayfish party." It reviewed revelations that Ardin had previously worked with right-wing anti-Castro organisations in Cuba. Her activities had led the Cuban government to request that she leave the country. Ardin had also interned at the Swedish embassy in Washington.

The article stated:

Australian journalist and expert on espionage Philip Knightley, who is backing Assange in his

battle with the British courts, does not believe Ardin is a CIA agent.

"There's no direct evidence," he told the *Sun-Herald*. But he said that decades of dealing with spy agencies had led him to suspect that she fitted the model of someone who could be useful to intelligence agencies.

"She's someone they would consider an asset. I do not think she has been recruited for this mission but once she realised she was in this position, she might have known the right people to contact."

The essence of Knightley's theory is that Ardin is someone whose high-level political activity inside Sweden's historically dominant party—and her ability to travel to contentious destinations such as Cuba and make connections with hostile emigre communities as part of her academic research—would make her a valuable source for Sweden's boutique spy agency.

In 2010, the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not consider reporting such serious questions to be engaging in "conspiracy theories." The article concluded by noting that the Swedish investigation was unfolding in a context where the "WikiLeaks founder is certainly the target of an angry superpower."

Nine years on, there is no question that the investigation was a frame-up. It served Washington's essential aims of embroiling Assange in the legal system, besmirching him and undermining his support.

All of those journalists, such as Miller, who have promoted the bogus case have served as the propagandists of this operation. While many of them have loudly condemned government attacks on the media, including Australian Federal Police raids targeting journalists in June, they helped foster the climate in which press freedom could be attacked through their relentless slander of Assange.



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