

Sweden issues international arrest warrant for WikiLeaks founder Assange

By David Walsh
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Swedish authorities, stepping up their persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, have issued an international arrest warrant for his detention in relation to trumped-up “rape” charges.

Sweden’s Director of Prosecution, Marianne Ny, claims that Assange needs to be questioned. “So far, we have not been able to meet with him to accomplish the interrogations,” she said. The court ruling will allow prosecutors to seek assistance from other nations to have him arrested.

The case against Assange is aimed at discrediting or weakening WikiLeaks, which has made public hundreds of thousands of secret US documents exposing the criminal character of the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. (See “The WikiLeaks documents and the rape of Iraq”) The Swedish prosecutor’s campaign has all the hallmarks of a “dirty tricks” operation organized or encouraged by either the Pentagon or the CIA, or both.

The charges have nothing to do with sexual assault, despite screaming media headlines. They relate to Assange’s encounters this past summer with two Swedish women. Rebutting prosecutor Ny’s comments in a strongly worded statement Tuesday, Mark Stephens, one of Assange’s British lawyers, explained that the allegations “do not constitute what any advanced legal system considers to be rape; as various media outlets have reported ‘the basis for the rape charge’ purely seems to constitute a post-facto dispute over consensual, but unprotected sex days after the event.”

The charges against Assange were, in fact, properly dropped last August within 24 hours by chief prosecutor Eva Finne, who found there was no “reason to suspect that he [Assange] had committed rape.” However, Assange’s identity had already been

unlawfully disclosed to the right-wing media by the Swedish authorities. Stephens asserts, “The so called ‘rape’ story was carried around the world and has caused Mr. Assange and his organization irreparable harm.”

The decision to withdraw the charges against Assange was overturned “after the intervention of a political figure, Claes Borgström, who is now acting for the women,” in Stephens’ words. Indeed, Borgström is a prominent attorney and Social Democratic politician. He served in the Swedish government from 2000 to 2007 and operates a law firm in partnership with Social Democratic politician and former Minister for Justice Thomas Bodström.

A Social Democratic government in Stockholm, under Göran Persson, supported the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and dispatched 500 Swedish troops to the conflict in early 2002. One of the two women making the allegations is associated with the Christian wing of Swedish Social Democracy.

In October, the Swedish Migration Board rejected Assange’s application to live and work in the Scandinavian country. “We have decided not to grant him a residence permit,” said Gunilla Wikström, in charge of his case. “He did not fulfill the requirements,” Wikström asserted, while refusing to provide any more details.

In his November 18 statement, Stephens further notes that the only way Assange and his attorneys “have been able to discover any substantive information regarding the investigation against him has been through the media. Over the last three months, despite numerous demands, neither Mr. Assange, nor his legal counsel has received a single word in writing from the Swedish authorities relating to the allegations.” This is a violation of the European Convention, which stipulates

that the accused must be informed promptly, and in a language he or she understands, of the nature of the charges against him.

Assange has repeatedly offered to be interviewed, first in Sweden before he left that country, and subsequently in Britain, “either in person or by telephone, videoconferencing or email and he has also offered to make a sworn statement on affidavit. All of these offers have been flatly refused by a prosecutor who is abusing her powers by insisting that he return to Sweden at his own expense to be subjected to another media circus that she will orchestrate,” explains Stephens. He continues, “This behavior is not a prosecution, but a persecution.”

A letter from one of Assange’s Swedish lawyers, Björn Hurtig, has also been made public, which documents the numerous attempts by his legal team to organize Assange’s questioning by Swedish authorities, to no avail.

Stephens concludes his press statement, “Our client has always maintained his innocence. ... As a result of these false allegations and bizarre legal interpretations our client now has his name and reputation besmirched. Thousands of news articles and 3.6 million web pages now contain his name and the word ‘rape’. Indeed, three out of four web-pages that mention Mr. Assange’s name also now mention the word ‘rape’—a direct result of incompetent and malicious behavior by Swedish government prosecutors.”

In a separate comment to the media, Stephens explained that he had “never seen anything like it in 30 years of legal practice.”

In July 2010 WikiLeaks released 77,000 secret Pentagon documents on the war in Afghanistan, and followed that up in October by making public nearly 400,000 more documents on the Iraq war.

The most recent batch of documents reveal, among other things, information on at least 15,000 previously undisclosed Iraqi civilian deaths; clear evidence of specific war crimes, including the killing in cold blood of Iraqi civilians; the murder of 834 Iraqi civilians at US military checkpoints; systematic torture carried out by the Iraqi army and police, with the complicity of the American military, and more.

The damning exposures, essentially ignored by the American media and political establishment, have nonetheless infuriated the US military and intelligence

apparatus. Hence, the stepped-up campaign against Assange.

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