

Lies, Smokescreens and the Shameful Smearing of Julian Assange

By [John Pilger](#)

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Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

Last December, I stood with supporters of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange in the bitter cold outside the Ecuadorean embassy in London. Candles were lit; the faces were young and old and from all over the world. They were there to demonstrate their human solidarity with someone whose guts they admired. They were in no doubt about the importance of what Assange had revealed and achieved, and the grave dangers he now faced. Absent entirely were the lies, spite, jealousy, opportunism and pathetic animus of a few who claim the right to guard the limits of informed public debate.

These public displays of warmth for Assange are common and seldom reported. Several thousand people packed Sydney Town Hall, with hundreds spilling into the street. In New York recently, Assange was awarded the Yoko Ono Lennon Prize for Courage. In the audience was Daniel Ellsberg, who risked all to leak the truth about the barbarism of the Vietnam War.

Like the philanthropist Jemima Khan, the investigative journalist Phillip Knightley, the acclaimed film-maker Ken Loach and others lost bail money in standing up for Julian Assange. "The US is out to crush someone who has revealed its dirty secrets," Loach wrote to me. "Extradition via Sweden is more than likely... is it difficult to choose whom to support?"

No, it is not difficult.

In the *New Statesman* last week, Jemima Khan, a philanthropist, ended her support for an epic struggle for justice, truth and freedom with an article on WikiLeaks's founder. To Khan, the Ellsbergs and Yoko Onos, the Knightleys and Loaches, and the countless people they represent, have all been duped. We are all "blinkerred". We are all mindlessly "devoted". We are all cultists.

In the final words of her *j'accuse*, Khan describes Assange as "an Australian L. Ron Hubbard". She must have known such gratuitous abuse would make a snappy headline — as indeed it did across the press in Australia.

I respect Jemima Khan for backing humanitarian causes, such as the Palestinians. She supports for Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism, of which I am a judge, and my own film-making. But her attack on Assange is specious and plays to a familiar gallery whose courage is tweeted from a smart-phone. One of Khan's main complaints is that Assange refused to appear in a film about WikiLeaks by the American director Alex Gibney, which she "executive produced". Assange knew the film would be neither "nuanced" nor "fair" and "represent the truth", as Khan claimed, and that its very title *WikiLeaks, We Steal Secrets*,

was a gift to the fabricators of a bogus criminal indictment that could doom him to one of America's hell-holes. Having interviewed axe grinders and turncoats, Gibney abuses Assange as paranoid. DreamWorks is also making a film about the "paranoid" Assange. Oscars all round.

The sum of Khan's and Gibney's attacks is that Ecuador granted Assange asylum without evidence. The evidence is voluminous. Assange has been declared an official "enemy" of a torturing, assassinating, rapacious state. This is clear in official files, obtained under Freedom of Information, that betray Washington's "unprecedented" pursuit of him, together with the Australian government's abandonment of its citizen: a legal basis for granting asylum.

Khan refers to a "long list" of Assange's "alienated and disaffected allies". Almost none was ever an ally. What is striking about most of these "allies" and Assange's haters is that they exhibit the very symptoms of arrested development they attribute to a man whose resilience and humour under extreme pressure are evident to those he trusts.

On her "long list" is London lawyer Mark Stephens, who charged him almost half a million pounds in fees and costs. This bill was paid from an advance on a book whose unauthorised manuscript was published by another "ally" without Assange's knowledge or permission. When Assange moved his legal defence to Gareth Peirce, Britain's leading human rights lawyer, he found a true ally. Khan makes no mention of the damning, irrefutable evidence that Peirce presented to the Australian government, warning how the US deliberately "synchronised" its extradition demands with pending cases and that her client faced a grave miscarriage of justice and personal danger. Peirce told the Australian consul in London in person that she had known few cases as shocking as this.

It is a red herring whether Britain or Sweden holds the greatest danger of delivering Assange to the US. The Swedes have refused all requests for guarantees that he will not be dispatched under a secret arrangement with Washington; and it is the political executive in Stockholm, with its close ties to the extreme right in America, *not the courts*, that will make this decision.

Khan is rightly concerned about a "resolution" of the allegations of sexual misconduct in Sweden. Putting aside the tissue of falsehoods demonstrated in the evidence in this case, both women had consensual sex with Assange, and neither claimed otherwise; and the Stockholm prosecutor, Eva Finne, all but dismissed the case. As Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape wrote in the *Guardian* last August, "The allegations against [Assange] are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction... The authorities care so little about violence against women that they manipulate rape allegations at will. [Assange] has made it clear he is available for questioning by the Swedish authorities, in Britain or via Skype. Why are they refusing this essential step in their investigation? What are they afraid of?"

This article originally appeared in the New Statesman. For a detailed response to legal questions posed by critics of Assange go to: www.justice4assange.com/extraditing-assange.html

For more information on **John Pilger**, visit his website at www.johnpilger.com

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About the author:

John Pilger is an award-winning journalist and filmmaker whose articles and documentaries have been published worldwide. For more information on John Pilger, visit his website at www.johnpilger.com

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