

"Julian Assange's supporters don't know who to fear most: the Great Satan that is America or 'feminazi' Sweden", Nathalie Rothschild writes as the WikiLeaks boss is fighting extradition to Sweden.



- [Assange case sparks rape 'grey zones' debate](#)
- [Swedish PM slams Julian Assange's claims](#)

LONDON – Walking solemnly up to a cluster of microphones outside Belmarsh Magistrates' Court in London on Monday, flanked by glamorous socialites, incessant camera flashes lighting up the grey February morning, Julian Assange paused for effect [and then pronounced](#) : 'A black box has been applied to my life and on the outside of that box has been written "rapist".' That box is now being opened, he continued, and 'I hope that over the next days we will see that the box is in fact empty and has nothing to do with the words that are on the outside of it.'

Addressing an international media scrum before a two-day extradition hearing - he is accused of sexual misconduct in Sweden - the Wikileaks founder and self-styled cyber warrior *extraordinaire*

gave the impression that he was practising for a role as himself in an American blockbuster movie. It was a

[celebrity-studded](#)

media spectacle. The courtroom was filled with

[tweeting journalists](#)

and Assange's celebrity backers, including Mick's-ex-wife-turned-human-rights-activist Bianca Jagger, socialite Jemima Khan, and the not-quite-so-glamorous veteran politician Tony Benn.

Assange's box metaphor may have been clunky, but it does reveal a great deal about his self-image. He sees himself as a solid, transparent truth-bearer, able – with a little help from his famous friends – to weather any storm or attack that may be levelled at him by the powers-that-be. He has a clear conscience and no dirty secrets.

A global conspiracy against St Julian?

Written by Nathalie Rothschild

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Assange and his legal team have decided to play on a kind of Superman/secular Jesus image, presenting the Wikileaks founder as the victim of a global crusade against a bringer of truth and upholder of justice. Two major forces are conspiring to nail him, they suggest: misandrist Sweden and superpower America.

Assange and his lawyers effectively turned the magistrates' court into a kind of phantasmagoria, projecting images of Sweden as a banana republic where Assange will be tried for 'sex by surprise' by man-hating prosecutors before being taken away by CIA agents, ready to force him into an orange jumpsuit and whisk him off to [Guantanamo Bay](#) or even put him on death row.



Before the sex charges, Assange had a very different view of Sweden. He had been promised a column in the tabloid *Aftonbladet* and planned to seek Swedish citizenship. He praised Sweden for its openness, transparency and high degree of protection for whistleblowers. This, after all, is the country that spawned Pirate Bay and Bahnhof, the company that hosts Wikileaks' servers in a [nuclear-proof bunker](#).

Oh, how things have changed. Now, Assange sees Sweden as ['the Saudi Arabia of feminism'](#). And his celebrity backers agree, lining up to accuse Sweden of being a global bully. Leftie war reporter John Pilger said Sweden ['should be ashamed'](#)

. Feminist writer Naomi Wolf wrote

[a letter to Interpol](#)

, accusing Sweden of acting as a 'global dating police' (apparently with no sense of irony).

Bumbling filmmaker Michael Moore wrote

[a letter](#)

to the Swedish government accusing it of 'cynically and disgustingly using the real and everyday threat that exists against women everywhere to help further the American government's interest in silencing the work of Wikileaks'.

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The fact that Assange hired top barrister [Geoffrey Robertson QC](#) to lead his defence at the extradition hearing this week is a further sign that his strategy might be to paint Sweden as a rogue state. For the Australian-British celebrity human rights lawyer is famous for having led the prosecution in hearings against Malawi's previous leader, Hastings Banda, and for serving as a judge on the United Nations war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone. Robertson has also expressed wishes to set up a 'Convention Against Tyranny'. In other words, this is an attorney who is used to putting nations and dictators on trial. Now he warns that Assange would face a secret, closed-door trial in Sweden, suggesting that the authorities there will mistreat an innocent man with impunity.

Granted, the grounds for the two women's sex accusations look pretty shaky, and Sweden's rape laws, widely regarded as the strictest in the world, are deeply problematic. Sweden has an image as a sexually liberated society, but the idea of women's sexual empowerment has become skewed. In Sweden, it is widely regarded as understandable for a woman to feel assaulted or taken advantage of if she hasn't given active consent every step of the way during a sexual interaction. This outlook appears to infuse the accounts of the two Swedish women who have accused Assange of sexual molestation and unlawful coercion.

Yet the attempt of Assange's legal team to paint Sweden as a feminist dictatorship that wilfully locks up any man accused of bad sex is fanciful. Back in December 2010, Assange's London attorney, Mark Stephens, claimed Swedish prosecutors told him that Assange was not wanted for allegations of rape, but for something called ['sex by surprise'](#). 'Whatever "sex by surprise" is, it's only an offence in Sweden - not in the UK or the US or even Ibiza', Stephens said. 'I feel as if I'm in a surreal Swedish movie being threatened by bizarre trolls.'

In fact, there is no obscure law against 'sex by surprise' in Sweden. This is a translation of a slang expression, *överraskningssex*, used to describe someone initiating sex without forewarning. Although some say this slang expression gives rape a positive slant, it's not something that would hold up in court as a criminal accusation.

There have been more conspiratorial twists and turns in this sordid saga than there are leaked cables on Wikileaks' servers. All of these theories and the celebrity-studded extradition hearing may make for an exciting Oscar-contending script some time in the future. But for now, let's get real and start thinking outside Assange's conspiracy-theory filled box.

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[Nathalie Rothschild](#) is a philosopher, writer and a friend of the disabled community. She is dedicated to raising awareness, prejudice, and promoting the rights of the disabled.