

Rape warrant against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange cancelled

Swedish authorities withdraw an arrest warrant for the founder of the whistleblowers' website on suspicion of rape

David Batty and agencies

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Swedish authorities have withdrawn an arrest warrant for Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, stating that the accusation of rape against him was unfounded.

The move came just a day after a warrant was issued by Sweden's prosecutors' office in Stockholm in response to accusations of rape and molestation in two separate cases.

"I don't think there is reason to suspect that he has committed rape," the chief prosecutor, Eva Finne, said.

She made no comment on the status of the molestation case, a less serious charge that would not lead to an arrest warrant.

Assange has denied both accusations, first reported by the Swedish tabloid Expressen, which were described as dirty tricks on the Wikileaks' Twitter account.

He implied that they were linked to the release by the whistleblowers' website of a huge cache of US military records on the Afghan war, which were published in collaboration with the Guardian and two other newspapers.

Assange wrote: "The charges are without basis and their issue at this moment is deeply disturbing."

Earlier postings on the Twitter account implied the accusations were part of a dirty tricks campaign against the Wikileaks founder, who has been strongly criticised by the Pentagon.

"Expressen is a tabloid; No one here has been contacted by Swedish police. Needless to say, this will prove hugely distracting.

"We were warned to expect 'dirty tricks'. Now we have the first one."

Last month Wikileaks released around 77,000 secret US military documents on the war in Afghanistan.

US authorities criticised the leak, saying it could put the lives of Nato troops and Afghan informants at risk.

Assange has said that Wikileaks intends to release a further 15,000 documents in the coming weeks - a pledge condemned by the Pentagon, which has demanded the deletion of the files from the website.

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Assange, an Australian citizen, was in Sweden last week to apply for a publishing certificate to make sure the website, which has servers in Sweden, can take full advantage of Swedish laws protecting whistleblowers.

He also gave a talk about his work and defended the decision by Wikileaks to publish the Afghan war logs.

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