

International campaign targets WikiLeaks web site

Joseph Kishore
4 December 2010

As part of efforts to block the release of documents obtained by WikiLeaks, there is an escalating campaign, led by the US government, to bring down the organization's web site. This effort is taking place in parallel with an international dragnet targeting WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Late on Thursday US time, the domain name hosting service for WikiLeaks, EveryDNS.net, announced that it had cut off WikiLeaks for violating its terms of service. The DNS host links a domain name (e.g., wikileaks.org) to a specific computer server address that holds the content of a web site.

On Friday night, evidently under pressure from the US government, PayPal announced that it would no longer process donations to WikiLeaks. PayPal declared that it took this step because WikiLeaks was engaged in "illegal activity," without making any attempt to explain what crime was being committed.

As a consequence of the action of EveryDNS, wikileaks.org no longer directs to WikiLeaks' servers. The site was functionally inaccessible for about 6 hours, before being reopened on Friday at several other domain names: wikileaks.ch, wikileaks.de, wikileaks.fi, and wikileaks.nl.

To justify its action, EveryDNS claimed that the WikiLeaks web site posed a danger to all the domain names served by the company as a result of persistent distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks on the site. Since a few days before the recent release of US State Department cables, WikiLeaks has been subject to an escalating Internet-based attack involving massive and continual requests for data aimed at overloading the organization's servers.

The stated reasons given by EveryDNS for its actions, however, cannot be taken at face value, and it is very possible that commercial or political pressure was brought to bear. EveryDNS was purchased earlier this year by Dyn Inc., which also owns DynDNS. The buyout is part of the consolidation of the free DNS market, which poses significant dangers for the freedom of the Internet.

The move by EveryDNS followed by one day the decision

by Amazon to kick WikiLeaks off of its hosted servers, after coming under pressure from US government officials. Shortly before the action, Amazon had been contacted by the office of US Senator Joseph Lieberman, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security.

Responding to Amazon's decision, Assange stated in an online question and answer session hosted by the British *Guardian* newspaper, "Since 2007 we have been deliberately placing some of our servers in jurisdictions that we suspected suffered a free speech deficit in order to separate rhetoric from reality. Amazon was one of these cases."

Amazon subsequently denied that its action was a response to pressure from the US government; however, its statement merely parrots the government line against WikiLeaks. "It's clear that WikiLeaks does not own or otherwise control all the rights" to the classified documents it has posted, Amazon claimed. That is, Amazon accepts without argument the position of the Obama administration that WikiLeaks does not have the legal right to publish the leaked documents.

The company also declared, without a shred of evidence, that it is "not credible" that WikiLeaks had taken sufficient measures to ensure that innocent people would not be harmed by information in the 250,000 documents. This claim ignores the fact that WikiLeaks has released only a small fraction of these documents, since it has very limited resources available to process them.

Amazon's anti-democratic decision will be used to pressure other companies to break off all connections with WikiLeaks, which could have even more serious consequences.

This intention was made clear by Lieberman, who declared in a statement that Amazon's decision "is the right decision and should set the standard for other companies WikiLeaks is using to distribute its illegally seized material. I call on any other company or organization that is hosting WikiLeaks to immediately terminate its relationship with them." Among the companies Lieberman no doubt has in

mind are Twitter and Facebook, which WikiLeaks has employed to spread information—including information about its new domain names.

On Friday, Tableau Software, a company that provided data visualizations created from the leaked documents, reported that it was removing all content related to WikiLeaks. In a blatant acknowledgement of self-censorship, a statement from the company declared: “Our decision to remove the data from our servers came in response to a public request by Senator Joe Lieberman, who chairs the Senate Homeland Security Committee, when he called for organizations hosting WikiLeaks to terminate their relationship with the website.”

The US government is doing whatever it can to block access to the content of WikiLeaks. The Department of Commerce released a memo on Friday demanding that all employees and contractors not access any content from the WikiLeaks web site. The Library of Congress has also blocked access to the web site on its networks.

WikiLeaks has access to several other servers in different countries, though these may also be threatened, particularly its servers in France. One of its servers has been hosted by the French company, OVH, since Amazon’s decision to cancel its hosting service.

On Friday, the French government took initial steps aimed at banning WikiLeaks from all French servers. Industry Minister Eric Besson declared, “France cannot host websites that violate diplomatic relations secrecy and endanger persons protected by diplomatic confidentiality.” Reflecting what is certainly intense pressure from the US, Besson added, “We cannot host sites that have been called criminal and rejected by other countries on the basis of harm to national rights.”

In a threat to all French server providers, Besson warned that any company with relations with WikiLeaks must understand the “consequences of their acts and secondly be made to take responsibility for them.”

In addition to these direct state or corporate actions against WikiLeaks, the DDoS attack is also highly suspicious, with possible links to the US government. A right-wing hacker, who specializes in targeting Muslim organizations, has claimed responsibility, though this has not been confirmed. The size of the attack has been large, with WikiLeaks reporting on November 30 that it exceeded 10 gigabites a second.

Meanwhile, the campaign against Assange continues, with political figures in the US leading the way. Responding to calls for WikiLeaks organizers to be killed (most recently, a *Washington Times* column headlined, “Assassinate Assange”), the WikiLeaks founder reported in the *Guardian* Q&A, “The threats against our lives are a matter

of public record. However, we are taking the appropriate precautions to the degree that we are able when dealing with a superpower.”

In an attempt to safeguard the documents and ensure that they are released even if something happens to Assange, WikiLeaks has distributed more than 100,000 “insurance files” to supporters, in encrypted form. “If something happens to us, the key parts will be released automatically,” Assange said.

The most immediate threat to Assange is a warrant for his arrest issued by Sweden on the basis of trumped-up charges. However, there is also speculation that Assange may already be the target of a US indictment, but that this indictment is being kept secret until he is arrested.

The *Christian Science Monitor* reported on Thursday, “US officials publicly will only say that they are investigating the matter and that no legal options have been ruled out. But an indictment in such an important federal matter would be handed down by a grand jury, and grand jury proceedings are secret, notes Stephen Vladeck, an expert in national security law at American University...”

“A judge could order an indictment of Assange sealed until such time as the US is able to apprehend him, or until he is in custody in a nation from which he is likely to be extradited,” the *Monitor* noted. “The purpose of such secrecy would be to keep the WikiLeaks chief from going even further underground.”

In addition to the immediate threat to WikiLeaks and its members, the campaign against the organization poses a grave threat to democratic rights, and in particular to the freedom of the Internet. The campaign to bring down the organization’s web site highlights the danger posed by the ownership and control of critical sections of the Internet by private corporations.

In recent weeks, the US government has taken a number of steps aimed at strengthening its ability to shut down web sites. On Monday, the Obama administration seized the domain names of 82 organizations alleged to be involved in piracy.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact