US escalates threats and attacks on WikiLeaks

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The US-led attack on the whistleblower web site WikiLeaks escalated Monday with Swiss bank officials shutting down access to a defense fund for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, and US Attorney General Eric Holder declaring that "significant" actions have already been taken in preparing a criminal prosecution of the organization.

The Swiss PostFinance bank closed down the account in Assange's name, on the flimsiest of technicalities, because Assange used the address of his Swiss lawyer to open the account. "It was revealed that Assange provided false information regarding his place of residence when opening the account," the bank said in a press release.

The action was taken the day after the US ambassador to Switzerland, Donald Beyer Jr., gave an interview to the Swiss weekly *NZZ am Sonntag* warning that the Swiss "should very carefully consider whether to provide shelter to someone who is on the run from the law."

While the account has not been forfeited, the bank said Assange would only be able to access the funds when he provided a home address in Switzerland, which would effectively require him to offer himself up as a target for legal actions or politically motivated violence.

Assange has been reported to be in hiding in southern England, where his attorneys are fighting an attempt by Swedish authorities to have him detained for questioning on trumped-up sex charges. WikiLeaks said on its Twitter page that a Swedish arrest warrant has been sent to New Scotland Yard.

In Washington, Holder issued a statement reiterating the claims of the Obama administration that the release of thousands of diplomatic cables classified as "secret" or "confidential" had damaged the interests of the US government.

"National security of the United States has been put at risk," he said. "The lives of people who work for the American people have been put at risk. The American people themselves have been put at risk by these actions that I believe are arrogant, misguided and ultimately not helpful in any way. We are doing everything that we can."

He declined to answer questions about technical methods for shutting down the WikiLeaks web site, nor would he discuss what methods were part of the investigation into the leaking of materials to the Internet organization, including search warrants and wiretaps.

But he disputed press reports that the only legal basis for prosecution of Assange and other WikiLeaks activists was the Espionage Act of 1917. "That is not the only tool we have to use in the investigation of this matter," he said. "People would be mis-impressioned if they think the only thing we are looking at is the Espionage Act."

The Swiss bank cutoff, combined with the decision by the US-based PayPal service to withhold funds routed through it to WikiLeaks, has cost the organization about €100,000 ($133,000), the group said on its web site.

WikiLeaks also reported continuously intensified denial-of-service attacks on its web site, which it is fighting to keep open, despite the loss of access to servers in the United States and France. Amazon.com broke off its service relationship with WikiLeaks last week, after pressure from Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman.

The domain name provider EveryDNS shut off access to the wikileaks.org URL, forcing the group to reopen on several similarly named addresses in other countries,

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including wikileaks.ch in Switzerland and wikileaks.nl in the Netherlands.

On Monday, WikiLeaks' Swedish servers came under attack again, with its Internet Service Provider PRQ saying that its servers had become unresponsive, probably due to another distributed denial of service attack, a technique for jamming servers by flooding them with requests from remote computers hijacked by rogue programs. PRQ said that no law enforcement organization, Swedish or otherwise, had put pressure on it for hosting WikiLeaks.

In response to an appeal issued by WikiLeaks on Sunday, hundreds of supporters set up mirror sites that contain the same leaked documents. This insures that no matter what measures are taken against the organization, the information it has uncovered about the secret activities and crimes of American imperialism will remain available to the public in most of the world.

Only the police-state regime in China, as well as the Arab monarchies and dictatorships of the Middle East, have been able to effectively block access by their own citizens to the web site. Iran has also sought to block access.

There was a further hue and cry Monday in the British and American media over one of the dispatches released that day by WikiLeaks, a lengthy cable from February 2009 asking embassies to list installations in their host countries whose loss would be critical to US security interests. Accompanying this request was the previous year's list of hundreds of factories, mines, storage depots, port facilities, etc.

This list of infrastructure sites was very general, sometimes naming only the city or country, without addresses, and with no details of security procedures or vulnerabilities. This did not stop the British and American media from presenting the cable as a database of targets for terrorists.

The government of British Prime Minister David Cameron led the way in the condemnation of the latest leak. A spokesman for Number 10 Downing Street said Monday morning, "We unequivocally condemn the unauthorised release of classified information. The leaks and their publication are damaging to national security in the United States, Britain and elsewhere. It is vital that governments are able to operate on the basis of confidentiality of information."

Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP, chairman of the House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee and a former defense minister, said the latest release by WikiLeaks "is further evidence that they have been generally irresponsible, bordering on criminal. This is the kind of information terrorists are interested in knowing."

Apparently we are to believe that, without WikiLeaks, terrorists would be unaware of the importance of such facilities as the ports of Shanghai and Hong Kong, the main terminal of the Baku-Ceyhan-Tbilisi oil pipeline, the iron ore mines of Brazil, and the Hydro Quebec complex that supplies electrical power to much of the northeastern US.

Other damaging "revelations" in the cable are that the Straits of Malacca, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz (which controls access to the Persian Gulf) and the Panama Canal are vital chokepoints for world trade and navigation.

The main significance of the list is that it demonstrates the truly global appetites of American imperialism. Washington views every country and continent as its proper field of activity and control, and is prepared to use both diplomatic chicanery and military force to pursue its interests.

In response to the escalating threats, WikiLeaks has renewed warnings that if the site is taken down by legal or technical action, a huge "insurance" file of data, already downloaded in encrypted form by tens of thousands of supporters, will be decrypted and made public. This reportedly would include many details of diplomatic, intelligence and military operations that have been withheld in previous releases of material.

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