

Obama joins attack on WikiLeaks

Joseph Kishore
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US president Barack Obama added his own comments to the increasingly vitriolic campaign against WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange, over the weekend. Obama called the actions by WikiLeaks, which have helped reveal Washington's sordid machinations in various parts of the world, "deplorable."

According to the White House, the president called Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip and "expressed his regrets for the deplorable action by WikiLeaks." The White House said that the two leaders agreed the leaked cables—including thousands from the US embassy in the Turkish capital of Ankara—would "not influence or disrupt the close co-operation between the United States and Turkey."

Obama made similar remarks in a telephone call to Mexican president Felipe Calderon.

The statements were the first direct comments from the president, who has allowed Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and Attorney General Eric Holder to take the lead in attacking WikiLeaks and threatening prosecution. Holder said last week that American authorities were actively pursuing some means of charging Assange and WikiLeaks for the release of the cables. Assange's lawyers have warned that a US indictment against their client may be imminent.

While condemning WikiLeaks, Obama has said nothing about the repeated calls from sections of the US media and political establishment for the assassination of Assange or the designation of WikiLeaks as a terrorist organization—thus tacitly legitimizing what amounts to an incitement to murder.

For its part, the American media has remained almost completely silent in the face of an internationally organized political persecution and attack on basic constitutional rights. The *New York Times*, one of the news organizations provided early access to all the cables, has not published a single editorial on the

persecution of WikiLeaks and has largely ceased publishing articles on the cables themselves.

There remains the real danger that the arrest of Assange in Britain—based on trumped-up charges of sexual misconduct in Sweden—will be followed by an attempted extradition to the United States. According to media reports last week, the US and Sweden are engaged in discussions over how this could be done. (See, "Obama administration steps up vendetta against WikiLeaks' Julian Assange")

In a documentary aired on Swedish public television on Sunday, with interviews obtained prior to his arrest, Assange denied the allegations and warned that he faced prosecution by US authorities over the WikiLeaks revelations.

"I came to Sweden as a refugee publisher involved with an extraordinary publishing fight with the Pentagon," he said, "There is an attempt to prosecute me for espionage. So I am unhappy and disappointed with how the Swedish justice system has been abused."

Assange is currently being held in an isolation unit in London's Wandsworth prison. He has very limited access to the Internet, telephone, and even his own lawyers. The decision to hold Assange in these conditions, and to deny him bail, is all the more extraordinary given the specious character of the charges against him.

Assange's lawyer, Bjorn Hurtig, said over the weekend that the charges against Assange were unfounded, telling London's *Daily Mail*, "It is clear that the women [who have made allegations against Assange] are lying and that they had an agenda when they went to the police, which had nothing to do with a crime having taken place."

Hurtig added, "If I am able to reveal what I know, everyone will realize this is all a charade. If I could tell the British courts, I suspect it would make extradition a moot point. But at the moment I'm bound by the rules

of the Swedish legal system, which say that the information can only be used as evidence in this country [Sweden]. For me to do otherwise would lead to me being disbarred.”

Swedish prosecutors initially dropped the case on the grounds that the charges were unfounded, but it was later picked up—likely under pressure from Washington.

Over the weekend, demonstrations were held in Spain and other countries against the persecution of WikiLeaks and Assange, organized by a Spanish group supporting WikiLeaks. Several hundred people gathered in rallies in Madrid and Barcelona. Other cities in Europe also saw demonstrations, varying in size from dozens to several hundred.

The protests followed demonstrations of several thousand in Australia on Friday.



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