

US security firms planned smear campaign against WikiLeaks

Julie Hyland
17 February 2011

US security firms drew up a plan for a campaign of smears and destabilisation against WikiLeaks, according to emails obtained and leaked by Anonymous, the cyber protest hackers.

Anonymous hacked into the email accounts of security firm HB Gary Federal and published some 50,000 of its emails online. The attack was in revenge for statements by chief executive Aaron Barr that the company had infiltrated Anonymous and could identify its leading personnel.

Anonymous said that the leaked emails showed that the companies “were entangled in highly dubious and most likely illegal activities, including a smear campaign against WikiLeaks, its supportive journalists, and adversaries of the US Chamber of Commerce and Bank of America.”

“Evidence even suggests that this was done with full knowledge of the US Department of Justice.”

Amongst the emails was a PowerPoint presentation drafted by HB Gary, in apparent conjunction with security firms Palantir Technologies and Berico, on how to subvert WikiLeaks. According to the *Tech Herald*, the three companies had been retained by law firm Hunton & Williams on behalf of Bank of America, after it was recommended by the US Department of Justice. All do work for the US Defence Department.

In October 2009, founder Julian Assange said that WikiLeaks had retrieved 5-gigabyte files from the hard drive of an executive at Bank of America. In November of last year, he said WikiLeaks would publish information in due course on illegal activities at a top US bank. With Bank of America rumoured to be the target, the PowerPoint presentation set out plans to take out WikiLeaks.

The *Tech Herald* reported, “The law firm had a meeting with Bank of America on December 3. To prepare, the firm emailed Palantir and the others asking for ‘five to six

slides on Wikileaks—who they are, how they operate and how this group may help this bank.’ ”

The result was the presentation “The Wikileaks Threat.”

Opening with a profile of WikiLeaks and Assange, it presents an “organisational chart” identifying several supporters, including writer Glenn Greenwald, a former constitutional and civil rights litigator. Greenwald has been prominent in exposing the arrest and detention of US Army Private Bradley Manning, who is being held in solitary confinement at the Quantico Marine Corps base, Virginia on suspicion of leaking classified documents to WikiLeaks.

The presentation claims that Greenwald is “critical” to WikiLeaks’ public support. It is “this level of support that needs to be disrupted,” it states, as “without the support of people like Glenn, WikiLeaks would fold.”

It suggests one means of disruption: “these are established professionals that have a liberal bent, but ultimately most of them if pushed will choose professional preservation over cause.”

Under “Strengths and Weaknesses,” the presentation identifies “global following and volunteer staff” as strengths and lists the following as weaknesses:

“Financial: They are under increasing financial pressure because authorities are blocking their funding sources.

“Security: Need to get to the Swedish document submission server. Need to create doubt about their security and increase awareness that interaction with WikiLeaks will expose you.

“Mission: There is a fracture among the followers because of a belief that Julien [sic] is going astray from the cause and has selected his own mission of attacking the US.”

“WikiLeaks is NOT in a healthy position right now” and its weakness “can be capitalised on,” the presentation states. “Speed is crucial!” it warns. “Combating this threat requires advanced subject matter expertise in

cybersecurity, insider threats, counter cyber-fraud, targeting analysis, social media exploitation.”

The three presenting security firms “can be deployed tomorrow against this threat.”

It suggests as “Potential Proactive Tactics”:

“Feed the fuel between the feuding groups. Disinformation. Create messages around actions to sabotage or discredit the opposing organisation. Submit fake documents and then call out the error.

“Create concern over the security of the infrastructure. Create exposure stories. If the process is believed to not be secure they are done.”

It also suggests cyber attacks aimed at getting information on those submitting documents and uncovering leaks. Also, a “Media campaign to push the radical and reckless nature of wikileaks activities. Sustained pressure. Does nothing for the fanatics, but creates concern and doubt among moderates.”

Another email from Barr to a Palantir employee reportedly suggests tracking and threatening people donating to WikiLeaks. Security firms, Barr wrote, “need to get people to understand that if they support the organisation we will come after them. Transaction records are easily identifiable.”

A spokesman for Bank of America said, “We’ve never seen the presentation, never evaluated it, and have no interest in it.”

Hunton and Williams declined to comment.

In December, the Bank of America, together with MasterCard, PayPal and Visa Europe, had stopped all payments to WikiLeaks in an effort to financially cripple the organisation.

Responding to the leaked emails, HB Gary claimed it was the victim of a “crime” and suggested that the documents were false—a claim rejected by Anonymous.

The two other firms named on the presentation disassociated themselves from HB Gary. Palantir Tech CEO Alex Karp said he had “directed the company to sever any and all contacts with HB Gary” and apologised “for any involvement that we may have had in these matters.”

Berico confirmed it had been approached to draft a proposal for a law firm that would “analyse internal information security and public relations challenges,” but said it was limited to “analysing publicly available information.”

Commenting on the leaks, Greenwald said his initial reaction had been to dismiss the reports, but “after learning a lot more over the last couple of days I now take

this more seriously—not in terms of my involvement but the broader implications this story highlights. For one thing, it turns out that the firms involved are large, legitimate and serious, and do substantial amounts of work for both the US government and the nation’s largest private corporations.”

Greenwald also noted the similarity with a secret report prepared by the US Army Counterintelligence Center in 2008, which discussed ways to sabotage WikiLeaks.

Obtained by WikiLeaks, the 2008 report stated, “Web sites such as Wikileaks.org have trust as their most important center of gravity by protecting the anonymity and identity of the insider, leaker, or whistleblower. Successful identification, prosecution, termination of employment, and exposure of persons leaking the information by the governments and businesses affected by information posted to Wikileaks.org would damage and potentially destroy this center of gravity and deter others from taking similar actions.”

This latest information underscores the fact that the US, with the support of other imperialist powers, is set on a massive and sustained attempt to sabotage and ultimately destroy WikiLeaks and its personnel. In addition to the attempt to disable WikiLeaks financially and through cyber sabotage, Assange himself is awaiting the ruling of a British judge as to whether he should be extradited to Sweden on trumped-up, politically motivated charges of rape. It is likely that he would be extradited on to the US, where prominent politicians and media commentators have publicly called for his murder.

The aim is not only to extract revenge for WikiLeaks having published thousands of US Embassy cables detailing Washington’s involvement in spying, torture and assassinations. It is also intended as a warning to any individual or group that tries to expose the dirty reality of imperialist diplomacy.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact