

Further evidence of secret US indictment of Julian Assange

Mike Head
1 March 2012

Internal emails obtained from the US private intelligence firm Stratfor indicate that the Obama administration has had a secret indictment against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for more than 12 months. The emails, published by WikiLeaks this week, also point to the close involvement of the Australian Labor government and intelligence agencies in the operation against Assange, an Australian citizen.

The emails were sent by Fred Burton, Stratfor's vice-president for counterterrorism and corporate security. Burton is a former deputy chief of the US Department of State's counterterrorism division for the Diplomatic Security Service (DSS). The DSS is playing a leading investigative role in the ongoing operation to extradite Assange to the US, where he would be tried under the Espionage Act of 1917 and could face the death penalty.

In January 2011, Burton revealed in Stratfor correspondence that a secret grand jury had issued an indictment: "Not for Pub—We have a sealed indictment on Assange. Pls protect." According to Burton: "Assange is going to make a nice bride in prison. Screw the terrorist. He'll be eating cat food forever."

A few weeks earlier, following Assange's release from a London jail, where he had been remanded as a result of a Swedish prosecutor's arrest warrant, Burton told SkyNews: "extradition [to the US is] more and more likely."

Burton's emails indicate that the US government is employing the same "counter-terrorism" methods against WikiLeaks as against Al Qaeda. "Take down the money. Go after his infrastructure. The tools we are using to nail and de-construct Wiki are the same tools used to dismantle and track aQ [Al Qaeda]," he wrote.

Later Burton pointed to a relentless dirty tricks and destabilisation operation. "Ferretting out [Assange's]

confederates is also key. Find out what other disgruntled rogues inside the tent or outside [sic]. Pile on. Move him from country to country to face various charges for the next 25 years. But, seize everything he and his family own, to include every person linked to Wiki."

The Stratfor emails undoubtedly reflect sentiments inside the Obama administration to exact revenge on Assange and destroy WikiLeaks for having exposed US war crimes all over the globe. These exposures began in April 2010, when WikiLeaks released a video of a massacre of civilians in Baghdad by a US attack helicopter. Since then the site has released thousands of documents detailing US killings of civilians and complicity in torture in Afghanistan and Iraq, and numerous other conspiracies carried out by Washington and its allies.

Burton's emails help confirm earlier reports, dating back to December 2010, that a secret grand jury had been empanelled in Virginia, near Washington, to prepare a sealed indictment under the Espionage Act.

In the past, this reactionary law has mostly been used to prosecute government officials who make classified information available to foreign agents. Now it is being employed to censor publication of politically damaging information. In earlier periods, the act was invoked to imprison American socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs, execute Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for allegedly passing nuclear information to the Soviet Union, and prosecute Daniel Ellsberg for leaking the Pentagon Papers, which exposed the US war crimes in Vietnam.

Responding to the Stratfor disclosures, Assange said: "For over a year now, the US Attorney General Eric Holder has been conducting a 'secret' grand jury investigation into WikiLeaks. This neo-McCarthyist

witch-hunt against WikiLeaks may be Mr. Holder's defining legacy. Any student of American history knows that secret justice is no justice at all."

The Stratfor correspondence makes clear the connection between Assange's indictment and the imprisonment of alleged WikiLeaks source Private Bradley Manning. In an email to Stephen Feldhaus, Stratfor legal counsel, Burton remarked: "I look forward to Manning and Assange facing a bajillion-thousand counts [of espionage]."

Manning has been held in US military brigades for more than one-and-a-half years, and subjected to months of solitary confinement, forced nakedness, sleep deprivation and other cruelties amounting to torture. This brutal treatment is aimed at forcing him into a plea bargain to help the US government's case against Assange. Currently under house arrest in Britain, Assange is awaiting a decision in his UK Supreme Court appeal against extradition to Sweden on baseless sex charges, which could quickly lead to his extradition to the US.

Assange's arrest, in December 2010, came just after WikiLeaks began publishing 251,287 leaked US embassy cables, the largest collection of confidential documents ever released into the public domain. WikiLeaks was subsequently subject to a block on financial donations by Visa, MasterCard and PayPal, forcing it to suspend its activities.

It is clear that Australian authorities, acting on the instructions of the Gillard government, are heavily involved in the conspiracy against Assange. In July 2010, Burton wrote to George Friedman, Stratfor CEO and founder: "We probably asked the ASIS [Australian Secret Intelligence Service] to monitor Wiki coms and email, after the soldier from Potomac [Manning] was nabbed. So, it's reasonable to assume we probably already know who has done it. The delay could be figuring out how to declassify and use the Aussie intel on Wiki."

Because of the widespread support for Assange in Australia and internationally, the Australian government has repeatedly denied any knowledge of his indictment. Yesterday, in parliament, the government's Senate leader, Chris Evans, again stated: "I can tell you that the Australian government is not aware of any charges by the US government against Mr. Assange."

These denials fly in the face of the record. The Labor government publicly backed the persecution of Assange from the outset. In December 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard improperly declared the WikiLeaks publication of the US cables "illegal." Without any legal basis, the then-attorney general, Robert McClelland, claimed that obtaining classified information was also an offence under Australian law. The government authorised an investigation, involving ASIS, the Australian Federal Police and other security agencies, to assist the US witch hunt.

The Labor government's complicity in the drive to railroad the WikiLeaks founder to jail is entirely in line with its unequivocal alignment behind the Obama administration's aggressive measures to confront China and other deemed threats to Washington's geo-strategic and economic interests. Canberra's involvement in the Assange operation is of a piece with Gillard's agreement to station US troops and host more US military planes, ships and submarines.

Assange and WikiLeaks are being pursued because their cable leaks have helped lay bare the criminal objectives and operations of US imperialism and its allies, including Australia, which stand in direct opposition to the interests and sentiments of the broad mass of the world's population.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact