Australian and US governments "playing word games"

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange speaks from Ecuadorian embassy

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WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange spoke out today from the Ecuadorian embassy in London about the escalating assault on his democratic rights and why he had been compelled to seek political asylum in Ecuador.

Interviewed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National "Breakfast" show, Assange refuted Australian and US government denials that there was a Grand Jury indictment against him on espionage or other trumped-up charges. He bluntly rejected Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's claims that her government was providing him with "ongoing consular support".

The Obama administration, closely assisted by the Australian government, is seeking to railroad Assange to jail because of WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of US and other government documents, exposing their war crimes and anti-democratic activities.

Last week the UK's Supreme Court rejected Assange's legal bid to reopen his final appeal against extradition to Sweden. His lawyers had argued that the arrest warrant was invalid, as it was issued by a Swedish prosecutor, who was not a "judicial authority" under UK extradition laws.

British police have declared that Assange will be arrested if leaves the Ecuadorian embassy. At the same time, the corporate media is stepping up its character assassination of the 40-year-old WikiLeaks editor. Media outlets have variously described Assange as "dishonest", "a fabulist", "amoral" and "cowardly".

The British media has also attempted to stir up resentment against Assange from the individuals who provided his £240,000 bail in December 2010. These efforts have failed. Author Phillip Knightley, for example, declared that he fully backed Assange and would provide any future bail money because the WikiLeaks editor was a "victim of flawed British and Swedish justice systems".

Assange told ABC radio that he rejected claims that he opposed extradition to Sweden because he was trying to "avoid questioning". He was not opposed to being questioned but was concerned over the Swedish extradition terms and the US moves to incarcerate him in an American prison.

If extradited to Sweden, he would be detained and held for as long as the investigation into the so-called sexual assault allegations took, he said. Assange also pointed out that Swedish authorities were demanding that he be given no time to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. The refusal of the Swedish prosecutor to question him in Britain, or by phone, had kept him "trapped" in Britain.

Responding to US and Australian government claims that Washington was not interested in extraditing him to America, Assange said US legal action against him was already underway and on the "public record".

The US Department of Justice, he said, was "playing a little game, and that little game is they refuse to confirm or deny the existence of a grand jury. And as a

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result, the press goes, ‘Oh well, they don’t confirm it, and therefore we can’t really write about it.’

“But that’s not true,” Assange said. “There’s public record everywhere, there’s multiple witnesses everywhere, there’s testimony in military courts about the existence of what is happening in these 48,000 pages, and that the founders and managers of WikiLeaks are amongst the subjects.”

Assange said two individuals with whom he previously worked—Jérémie Zimmermann and Smári McCarthy—had recently been detained at American airports and interrogated by FBI officials about WikiLeaks activities.

Assange added that the US was spending “vast resources” on its operations against him. He revealed that WikiLeaks had just discovered that the Department of Justice had awarded a $2 million contract to MANTEC, an IT systems company, to maintain the government’s computer system operations against WikiLeaks.

Claims by Australian Attorney-General Nicola Roxon and Foreign Minister Bob Carr that Canberra was providing extensive consular assistance, were bogus, Assange said. “What are they talking about?” he asked. No one from the Australian High Commission had met with him since December 2010. “They send SMS messages saying ‘Does Mr Assange have any concerns?’ But this is so they can tick off a box.”

The WikiLeaks editor told ABC radio that when his concerns were sent to Canberra in writing, its response was “dismissal in every area”.

Assange said it was necessary to focus on “the essential issues” in the attack on his basic rights.

“In a case where the truth is on your side, what is most against you is lack of scrutiny, so I welcome the scrutiny.” This was the only way, he added, to expose “the slimy rhetoric coming out of the US ambassador to Australia, by Gillard, and by the foreign minister. And that really needs to stop.”

WikiLeaks spokesman Kristinn Hrafnsson said yesterday that contrary to previous media reports, Assange had “no idea” when a decision would be made on his asylum bid.

The Ecuadorian government, he said, was still awaiting information from the UK, the US and the Swedish authorities. He would remain in the embassy until the matter was settled.

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