

US military brands Assange, WikiLeaks as “the enemy”

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Secret US Air Force documents reveal that the American military has branded WikiLeaks and its editor Julian Assange as “the enemy”, placing them on a legal par with Al Qaeda and threatening them with the same treatment: indefinite detention without trial, or death.

The documents, released under US freedom of information laws and first reported in the Australian daily *Age*, stem from an investigation by the Air Force’s counterintelligence branch, the Office of Special Investigations. They had been classified “Secret/NoForn,” meaning they were not to be shared with any non-US personnel.

The target of the investigation was a US Air Force cyber systems analyst stationed in Britain, who was accused of sympathies for Assange and WikiLeaks and participating in protests on their behalf. WikiLeaks’ publication of secret documents exposing US crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere have earned it broad popular support, while provoking an international campaign of persecution and vilification by the US government and the corporate media.

The Air Force investigators were probing whether the analyst, who had access to the US military’s Secret Internet Protocol Router network, had passed on secret documents to WikiLeaks supporters.

What was most significant about the document is that the WikiLeaks supporters were defined as an “anti-US and/or anti-military group,” and the charge being contemplated in the case was “aiding the enemy” under Article 104 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Under this same code, “enemy” is defined as “organized forces of the enemy in time of war, any hostile body that our forces may be opposing, such as a rebellious mob or a band of renegades, and includes civilians as well as members of military organizations.”

For those found guilty in a court martial, aiding the enemy carries the death penalty.

The analyst denied giving any classified material to WikiLeaks, and charges were dropped, while her access to such information was suspended.

Bradley Manning—the US Army soldier who was arrested in Iraq and charged with providing WikiLeaks with hundreds of thousands of classified US military and diplomatic cables, exposing massacres and civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as US conspiracies worldwide—has also been charged with aiding the enemy.

In Manning’s case, however, the military has argued that by allegedly helping WikiLeaks publish secret US documents, he had provided aid to Al Qaeda. Chillingly enough, given that anyone in the military speaking to the media would run the risk of such a charge, it defined Al Qaeda and not the media itself—in this case, WikiLeaks—as “the enemy.” With the declassified Air Force document, however, this distinction has been erased.

Michael Ratner, Assange’s US attorney and president emeritus of the Center for Constitutional Rights, described the implications of this shift as extremely serious for his client. He noted that the Air Force expressed no specific concerns over documents being published and thereby supposedly made accessible to Al Qaeda, as in the Manning case, but rather concentrated solely on the alleged threat of secrets being shared with Assange or his supporters.

“It appears that Julian Assange and WikiLeaks are the ‘enemy,’” said Ratner. “An enemy is dealt with under the laws of war, which could include killing, capturing, detaining without trial, etc.”

The WikiLeaks editor has been confined for the last three months to the London embassy of Ecuador, which has granted him asylum, concluding that Assange faced a grave threat of political persecution at the hands of the US government if the British government carried through its plan to deport him to Sweden. The Swedish government,

which has charged him with no crime, has demanded that he be extradited there to face trumped-up allegations of sexual misconduct. Detention in Sweden would pave the way for Washington to seek his extradition to the US on espionage or conspiracy charges, which have already been presented to a secret grand jury in Virginia.

It was from this London embassy that Assange addressed via video a packed audience at a meeting organized Wednesday at the United Nations in conjunction with the opening of the General Assembly.

Assange used the address to issue a stinging rebuttal to the hypocritical and lying address delivered to the UN General Assembly the day before by US President Barack Obama.

The WikiLeaks editor stressed that his own case gave the lie to Obama's posturing as an international champion of democratic rights, and he denounced him for "criminalizing more speech than all previous US presidents combined."

The Obama administration, he charged, "is trying to erect a national regime of secrecy. A national regime of obfuscation. A regime where any government employee revealing sensitive information to a media organization can be sentenced to death, life imprisonment or for espionage and journalists from a media organization with them."

Assange began his remarks with what he called "an American story," a tribute to the imprisoned soldier Bradley Manning that deliberately tracked Obama's recent United Nations address, which began with a eulogy for the US ambassador killed in the assault on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya.

"Bradley Manning, science fair all-star, soldier and patriot was degraded, abused and psychologically tortured by his own government," Assange said. "He was charged with a death penalty offense. These things happened to him, as the US government tried to break him, to force him to testify against WikiLeaks and me." He noted that as of Wednesday Manning had been detained without trial for 856 days.

The WikiLeaks editor also ridiculed Obama's claim that Washington had "supported the forces of change" in the Middle East.

Referring to the Tunisian fruit vendor whose death ignited the revolt in Tunisia, the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, Assange said, "Mohammed Bouazizi did not set himself on fire so that Barack Obama could be re-elected."

He added, "The world knew, after reading WikiLeaks

publications, that the Ben Ali regime and its government had for long years enjoyed the indifference, if not the support, of the United States—in full knowledge of its excesses and its crimes."

Assange continued: "It must come as a surprise to the Egyptian teenagers who washed American teargas out of their eyes that the US administration supported change in Egypt. It must come as a surprise to those who heard Hillary Clinton insist that Mubarak's regime was 'stable,' and when it was clear to everyone that it was not, that its hated intelligence chief, Suleiman, who we proved the US knew was a torturer, should take the realm."

Citing Obama's sermonizing to the assembled leaders at the UN that "those in power have to resist the temptation to crack down," Assange demanded that the US president heed his own words. "It is time for the US to cease its persecution of WikiLeaks, to cease its persecution of our people, and to cease its persecution of our alleged sources," he said.

The Obama administration has not the slightest intention of heeding this demand, however. As the declassified Air Force documents make clear, it is escalating its attack on WikiLeaks. The US ruling establishment is intent on destroying Assange and WikiLeaks as an example for all those who would dare to expose its bloody crimes.

Should it succeed in this attempt, it would spell a profound intensification of the assault on basic democratic rights waged in the US and internationally under the pretext of a "war on terror."

The fight to defend WikiLeaks, Assange and Manning cannot be carried forward through appeals to Obama. It requires the broadest mobilization of workers and youth in the US, Britain, Australia and internationally in their defense as part of a political struggle against the governments involved in their persecution, and the capitalist system itself, which is the source of the assault on basic democratic rights.



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