

Stratfor hacker sentenced to ten years in prison

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On Friday November 15, 28-year old Jeremy Hammond, an Anonymous-affiliated hacker, anti-war activist, and anarchist from Chicago, was sentenced to ten years in prison and three years' probation by US District Court Chief Judge for New York Loretta Preska.

Hammond was arrested in Chicago on March 5, 2012 by the FBI. He was charged with conspiracy to commit hacking. Also named in the indictment are Ryan Ackroyd, an English citizen serving 30 months in prison; Jake Davis, from Scotland, currently serving 24 months in a youth detention facility; and Darren Martyn and Donncha O'Cearbhaill. Neither Martyn O'Cearbhaill were required to serve time. All five were members of a group of hackers called LulzSec.

On May 28, Hammond pleaded guilty to nine different charges. Hammond explained that he changed his 2012 not-guilty plea to guilty because US prosecutors threatened him with a 30-year prison sentence by increasing the estimated damages attributed to LulzSec hacks.

Aggressive prosecution and disproportionate sentencing are part of the Obama administration's commitment to harshly punishing those who make information accessible to the public, in the effort to intimidate potential whistleblowers.

This commitment is evident in Preska's ruling, in which she emphasized the "desperate need to promote respect for the law," and a "need for adequate public deterrence." Preska also referred to a "total lack of respect for the law" on the part of the hackers.

Citing Hammond's felony conviction for hacking when he was 19, she referred to his "unrepentant recidivism." Hammond served two years in an Illinois federal prison for the 2006 hacking of the Protest Warrior web site and the release of its users' credit

card information. Protest Warrior targeted anti-war veterans.

One week before his sentencing, Hammond delivered a statement, insisting that "People have a right to know what governments and corporations are doing behind closed doors."

Hammond fought to have Preska, who is a member of the Federalist Society of right-wing jurists and lawyers, recuse herself from the case. Her husband was named in the StratFor leaks, and he represents StratFor clients.

Judge Preska has been involved in several high-profile trials involving the military intelligence apparatus. She heard the plea of Ahmed Khalfan Gailani in the first civilian trial of a Guantanamo Bay detainee in 2009. She also presided over the trial of Susan Lindauer, a former journalist and legislative aide arrested and charged in 2003 under the Patriot Act with acting as an agent for the regime of Saddam Hussein. Preska declared her unfit to stand trial, stating that Lindauer's claim to have worked with state intelligence was evidence of her mental illness.

LulzSec started out hacking for entertainment and to cause trouble—having hacked Fine Gael's 2011 election website, Fox Broadcasting's home page, and a popular pornography web site—by dumping usernames and passwords onto the Internet. Later the group's activity took on a political character, influenced by anarchistic conceptions.

The group hacked the computers of a local chapter of Infragard, an information sharing and analysis project of the FBI and individuals representing the private sector, as well as the Arizona Department of Public Safety, which polices highways and immigration at the state level. The group released documents marked "sensitive" in addition to usernames and passwords.

In 2011, Hammond and others hacked Austin-based

intelligence firm Strategic Forecasting (StratFor). StratFor is a private company founded in 1996 and led by George Friedman, a former professor and national defense intelligence specialist with ties to the US military and intelligence apparatus.

Hammond turned millions of StratFor email exchanges over to media outlets and WikiLeaks, which posted 900,000 them as the Global Intelligence Files. The indiscriminate release of information—an expression of the anarchistic views of the hackers—also exposed the emails, credit card numbers and addresses of thousands of individual subscribers to Stratfor who have no connection to state operations. After the release of the StratFor subscriber data, about \$700,000 was charged to the credit cards using the information released.

The correspondence with Stratfor's myriad government and private sector clients did include some unpublicized aspects of US and foreign military and security operations. Documents show information sharing between StratFor and state and federal law enforcement regarding Occupy Wall Street groups, as well as the use of terror laws to seize assets that would otherwise be out of reach of a client.

Other revelations of note include StratFor's monitoring of Bhopal chemical disaster activists on behalf of Dow Chemical, the sealed US indictment against Julian Assange, and an exchange indicating that the final destination Osama bin Laden's remains was Dover Air Force Base.

Unbeknownst to the group, LulzSec member Hector Monsegur had been arrested earlier in 2011 for hacking. Monsegur agreed to inform on Hammond and the others in exchange for lenient treatment. Through Monsegur's chat logs, the FBI was able to determine who members of LulzSec were. Hammond also agreed to use Monsegur's servers to store data from LulzSec's hacks.



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