

Leaked documents detail NSA surveillance operations against WikiLeaks

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Documents from whistleblower Edward Snowden show that the US National Security Agency and British GCHQ have carried out political surveillance operations targeting WikiLeaks, its founder Julian Assange and readers of the whistle-blowing web site. In addition to the US and Britain, the operations also involved the other members “of the ‘Five Eyes’ allied countries (New Zealand, Australia and Canada).

The documents were posted by Glenn Greenwald and Ryan Gallagher on the *Intercept* in an extensive expose titled “Snowden Documents Reveal Covert Surveillance and Pressure Tactics Aimed at WikiLeaks and Its Supporters.” Among other things, they show that the agency has collected IP addresses of computers visiting the WikiLeaks site, considered classifying WikiLeaks as “a malicious foreign actor,” and placed Assange on an NSA “manhunting” list that included alleged Al Qaeda terrorists.

The leaked documents have further exposed as lies the claims of the Obama administration that the NSA police-state apparatus is directed against “terrorists.” In reality, the NSA is using its illegal and secret access to the internet backbone to monitor the internet activity of its political adversaries and anyone considered a threat to the interests of the American ruling class.

The government of the UK has played a major role in the targeting of the web site. The leaked documents contained information about a GCHQ program called ANTICRISIS GIRL. The program is revealed in a Power Point slide prepared by the British spy agency for the 2012 SIGDEV Conference, an annual symposium held by the surveillance bureaucracies of the major powers. Under ANTICRISIS GIRL, GCHQ has been collecting IP addresses of individual computers that visit the WikiLeaks site, allowing them to identify and surveil individuals who access

WikiLeaks.

As the *Intercept* wrote, “GCHQ used its surveillance system to secretly monitor visitors to a WikiLeaks site. By exploiting its ability to tap into the fiber-optic cables that make up the backbone of the Internet, the agency confided to allies in 2012, it was able to collect the IP addresses of visitors in real time, as well as the search terms that visitors used to reach the site from search engines like Google.”

“Illustrating how far afield the NSA deviates from its self-proclaimed focus on terrorism and national security,” the *Intercept* wrote, “the documents reveal that the agency considered using its sweeping surveillance system against Pirate Bay, which has been accused of facilitating copyright violations. The agency also approved surveillance of the foreign ‘branches’ of hacktivist groups, mentioning Anonymous by name.”

It must be assumed that by tapping into Internet cables operated by powerful telecommunications companies, the US government and its allies are able to monitor virtually all Internet activity.

Claims that surveillance does not target Americans have also been further discredited by the leak. One entry from the leaked NSA documents states that it is “Okay to go after foreign servers which US people use also” saying that surveillance operators should “try to minimize” the number of American users swept up in their electronic dragnet. When data from a US user is improperly captured, the documents state, this is “nothing to worry about.”

The US government has carried out a coordinated campaign against WikiLeaks in particular, beginning with the release of the Afghanistan War Logs in July of 2010.

An NSA file titled “Manhunting Timeline” from 2010 described the maneuvers of the US as it sought to

coordinate an “international effort to focus the legal element of national power upon non-state actor Assange, and the human network that supports WikiLeaks.” In August 2010, the US government pressed 10 other countries to level criminal charges against Assange, describing him as “founder of the rogue WikiLeaks internet website and responsible for the unauthorized publication of over 70,000 classified documents covering the war in Afghanistan.”

For publishing documents that exposed the war crimes of the US ruling class, Assange is now listed in this gruesomely named file, which is filled with high priority enemies of the state. The “Manhunting Timeline,” according to the *Intercept*, “details, on a country-by-country basis, efforts by the US government and its allies to locate, prosecute, capture or kill alleged terrorists, drug traffickers, Palestinian leaders and others.”

Baltasar Garzón, a Spanish jurist who represents WikiLeaks, said, “These documents demonstrate that the political persecution of WikiLeaks is very much alive. The paradox is that Julian Assange and the WikiLeaks organization are being treated as a threat instead of what they are: a journalist and a media organization that are exercising their fundamental right to receive and impart information in its original form, free from omission and censorship, free from partisan interests, free from economic or political pressure.”

The leaks show that the NSA has proposed listing of Assange as a “malicious foreign agent,” a move which the *Intercept* said “would have allowed the group to be targeted with extensive electronic surveillance—without the need to exclude US persons from surveillance searches.”

Assange is currently trapped in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. He faces the danger of being extradited to Sweden on trumped-up allegations of sexual assault. An NBC report earlier this month documented the use of sex scandals and other dirty tricks to undermine targets.

ANTICRISIS GIRL is one component of Britain’s surveillance efforts. The Global Telecoms Exploitation (GTE), which plays a role in ANTICRISIS, is also involved in the expansive data mining program TEMPORA. TEMPORA collects data from the backbone of the internet, enabling the surveillance agencies to access vast amounts of private information.

Intercept wrote about GTE and its role with GCHQ, “Operating in the United Kingdom and from secret British eavesdropping bases in Cyprus and other countries, GCHQ conducts what it refers to as ‘passive’ surveillance—indiscriminately intercepting massive amounts of data from Internet cables, phone networks and satellites. The GTE unit focuses on developing ‘pioneering collection capabilities’ to exploit the stream of data gathered from the Internet.”

In response to the leaks, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange posted a statement online, saying that the intelligence agencies were operating above the law.

“News that the NSA planned these operations at the level of its Office of the General Counsel is especially troubling,” Assange said. “The NSA and its UK accomplices show no respect for the rule of law.”

Gus Hosein, head of the human rights organization Privacy International, similarly cited the documents as evidence of the collapse of the rule of law. “We may be tempted to see GCHQ as a rogue agency, ungoverned in its use of unprecedented powers generated by new technologies. But GCHQ’s actions are authorized by [government] ministers. The fact that ministers are ordering the monitoring of political interests of Internet users shows a systemic failure in the rule of law.”



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