

Key witness against Assange admits to lying in exchange for US immunity

Oscar Grenfell
27 June 2021

Sigurdur “Siggi” Thordarson, a convicted criminal from Iceland, has admitted that the main allegations he made against Julian Assange, which form a central component of the US indictment against the WikiLeaks founder, were lies proffered in exchange for immunity from American prosecution.

The revelation, contained in an extensive article by *Stundin*, a well-known Icelandic biweekly, is dramatic confirmation that the US attempt to prosecute Assange is a criminal enterprise.

It again demonstrates that the American Espionage Act charges against Assange, and the proceedings for his extradition from Britain to the US, are a pseudo-legal cover for an extraordinary rendition. In this operation, the US Justice Department has collaborated with individuals whom it knows to be criminals, in the concoction of a fabricated indictment that was then submitted to the British courts.

In June 2020, US prosecutors issued a new superseding indictment against Assange, months after the first week of British court hearings for his extradition.

The document contained the existing 17 Espionage Act charges against Assange, over WikiLeaks 2010 and 2011 publication of US army war logs from Iraq and Afghanistan and hundreds of thousands of American diplomatic cables. Leaked by the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning, the material included evidence of widespread war crimes, as well as the intrigues and conspiracies of American imperialism on a world scale.

The June indictment did not contain additional charges. It was a transparent effort to bolster the 18th count against Assange, which accuses him of attempted computer intrusion in league with Manning. In the January 2020 British court hearings, that charge had been demolished by defence evidence, showing that Assange and Manning had not hacked into any American computer system.

At the same time the US was faced with a growing public recognition that the Espionage Act charges against Assange were an attempt to criminalise press freedom, in violation of international law and the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

American prosecutors responded by incorporating false testimony they had already secured from Thordarson and Hector “Sabu” Monsegur, a criminal hacker turned FBI

supergrass. The information they furnished was aimed at bolstering the narrative that Assange was a common-variety hacker and criminal, not a journalist and publisher.

In an interview with *Stundin*, Thordarson has walked-back virtually all of the claims he made for the indictment. According to *Stundin*, his statements are corroborated by previously unpublished documents and chat logs. The June indictment refers to Thordarson as “teenager” and Iceland as “NATO Country 1.” It asserted as fact that:

- In 2010, Assange “asked Teenager to commit computer intrusion and steal additional information, including audio recordings of phone conversations between officials in NATO Country-1, including members of parliament.” As per *Stundin*, “Thordarson now admits... that Assange never asked him to hack or access phone recordings of MPs.” Instead Thordarson is now claiming that such recordings were provided to him by a third party, without any involvement by Assange. Thordarson says he later offered to show the files to the WikiLeaks founder, without knowing what they contained.

- “[T]hat Mr. Assange and Teenager failed a joint attempt to decrypt a file stolen from a NATO country 1 bank.” Thordarson now says this refers to encrypted files which were widely circulated online in 2010, and were believed to relate to the collapse of Icelandic Landsbanki in the financial crisis two years earlier. The files were thought to have been uploaded by a whistleblower, and there is no indication that Assange had any involvement in the leak or dissemination of the material.

- That Assange “used the unauthorized access given to him by a source, to access a government website of NATO country-1 used to track police vehicles.” Thordarson now says he had access to the site as a volunteer in a search and rescue team, and that Assange never requested to look at it.

- That in 2011 Assange oversaw and approved of communications between Thordarson and Monsegur, the head of the Lulzsec hacking group, including over planned cyber

attacks targeting Iceland. By that stage, Monsegur had been caught by the FBI and had become an informant. *Stundin* states that based on documents provided by Thordarson, “There is no indication WikiLeaks staff had any knowledge of Thordarson’s contacts with aforementioned hacking groups, indeed the logs show his clear deception.”

More broadly, the *Stundin* article sheds further light on Thordarson’s relationship with WikiLeaks, which has consistently been exaggerated by the American authorities and the press. It notes that he was never a member of the organisation, but insinuated himself into a peripheral role in 2010 by volunteering for it. Almost immediately, Thordarson began moonlighting with journalists and hackers by falsely presenting himself as a prominent WikiLeaks representative.

This fraudulent behaviour escalated in the summer of 2011, when Thordarson initiated contact with Monsegur. According to *Stundin*, “all indications are that Thordarson was acting alone without any authorization, let alone urging, from anyone inside WikiLeaks.”

By August 2011, the game was up, and Thordarson was being pursued by WikiLeaks members, along with \$50,000 in merchandise sales he had diverted into his bank account by impersonating Assange. It was then that Thordarson, apparently, emailed the FBI and offered to provide them with information.

It has long been public knowledge that in August 2011, a planeload of US state operatives arrived in Reykjavik, Iceland’s capital. They claimed to be there to investigate threats to Iceland’s cyber-security, which the US State Department had first warned of the year before. When Iceland’s Interior Minister Ögmundur Jónasson found out that this was a false pretext, he surmised that the operatives were there to entrap Assange and sent them packing. *Stundin* has now confirmed that the agents had flown in to pick up Thordarson, less than 48 hours after he offered to cooperate with the FBI.

Notwithstanding the initial setback, the relationship between the Icelandic criminal and the American spies was rapidly consummated. They took possession of files that Thordarson had illegally stolen from WikiLeaks, and repeatedly flew him out of Iceland, all expenses paid.

Thordarson’s fortunes changed in 2013 and 2014. In a series of court cases, he was convicted of embezzling from WikiLeaks and others, impersonating Assange and molesting multiple underage boys. A psychiatric assessment presented to the court found that Thordarson was a sociopath.

Having seemingly been dropped by the US authorities, Thordarson was picked up again by the American government after they orchestrated Assange’s expulsion from London’s Ecuadorian embassy in April 2019, and unveiled criminal charges against him. In May 2019, Thordarson was granted an immunity deal by the Trump administration, signed by Kellen S. Dwyer, the deputy of Attorney General William Barr.

In exchange for providing his lies against Assange, Thordarson was given immunity from any American prosecution. The US authorities also agreed to hide from Iceland and other countries any wrongdoing committed by the conman, even if it involved hacking and threats to their national security. According to *Stundin*, Thordarson has made the most of the deal, beginning a major crime spree involving theft on a large scale, forgery and financial deception.

The involvement of Thordarson exposes the attempted US prosecution of Assange as an illegitimate dirty tricks operation, carried out in violation of national laws spanning multiple countries, and international legislation. For the past decade, the American governments of presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden have collaborated at the highest level with a pedophile and conman to subvert Iceland’s national sovereignty, frame a journalist and lie to British courts.

US allies are also implicated in this operation. The British Conservative government and Labour opposition have facilitated Assange’s extradition hearings based on these sordid foundations. In her January ruling, British District Court Judge Vanessa Baraitser upheld all of the substantive US allegations against Assange, including Thordarson’s lies, only ruling against extradition on the grounds that the WikiLeaks founder’s health has been destroyed and he would die in a US prison.

The Australian government and Labor opposition have refused to defend Assange, despite him being an Australian citizen, and declared their great confidence in the British “legal process.” The latest revelations brand them as the accomplices of the US intelligence agencies and their criminal stool pigeons in violating the rights of an Australian journalist.

The Thordarson revelations show that workers, students and young people everywhere must take up the demand that the Biden administration immediately drop all charges against Assange; that the UK authorities end the extradition proceedings and immediately grant Assange’s unconditional freedom, and that the Australian government uphold the rights of a citizen.

The filthy and criminal character of the US pursuit of Assange, moreover, shows that the American government is seeking to establish a precedent that could be used to destroy any publisher, political activist or worker who takes a stand against it. Under conditions of a major escalation of the class struggle, and growing social and political opposition, this precedent must not be allowed to stand.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)