

Joshua Schulte convicted on all counts in second trial over 2017 leak of Vault 7 cyberwarfare trove published by WikiLeaks

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Former CIA software engineer Joshua Schulte, 33, was convicted by a jury in a Manhattan federal court on Wednesday of hacking top-secret US intelligence malware tools known as “Vault 7” and leaking them to WikiLeaks in 2017.

The jury found Schulte, who defended himself in court, guilty on eight espionage charges and one obstruction charge after deliberating for three days. He faces a possible sentence of 80 years in prison.

Schulte has been the target of a malicious campaign by the US intelligence community, which initially could find no evidence against him directly related to the Vault 7 leak and instead brought possession of child pornography charges against him and locked him up. Meanwhile, a first trial in against Schulte ended in 2020 with a hung jury on the espionage charges and only found him guilty of contempt of court and lying to the FBI.

Schulte argued that he was being made a scapegoat for the CIA’s staggering inability to protect its Vault 7 arsenal and “wildly insecure” intelligence servers that hosted it. Meanwhile, Schulte has been held in jail since 2018 without bail. He has complained that he was the victim of cruel and unusual punishment, awaiting the two trials in solitary confinement inside a vermin-infested cell of a jail unit where inmates are treated like “caged animals.”

The vicious pursuit of Schulte by the CIA, FBI and US Justice Department is part of the ongoing campaign to extradite WikiLeaks publisher and founder Julian Assange from the UK to the US to face numerous charges of violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

The effort to silence and prosecute Assange has been a bipartisan affair overseen by three successive

Presidents—initiated under Obama, continued by Trump and now being waged by Biden. The aim of the US political and intelligence establishment is to make an example of anyone who dares to tell the truth about the US imperialism, especially the war crimes committed over the past 30 years.

The Vault 7 breach of 9,000 documents, the largest theft of classified US intelligence information in history, exposed the CIA’s criminal violation of basic democratic rights by hacking Apple and Android smartphones and turning internet-connected televisions into listening devices, along with many other cyberespionage and malware tools.

At the time of the leak in 2017, Assange noted that the Vault 7 breach marked a massive security blunder by the CIA, which lost control of its hacking arsenal including malware, viruses, trojans, weaponized “zero day” exploits, malware remote control systems and associated documentation.

A statement about the Vault 7 leak published by WikiLeaks says, “This extraordinary collection, which amounts to more than several hundred million lines of code, gives its possessor the entire hacking capacity of the CIA. The archive appears to have been circulated among former US government hackers and contractors in an unauthorized manner, one of whom has provided WikiLeaks with portions of the archive.”

In exposing Vault 7, WikiLeaks brought to the attention of the entire world the fact that the US government had developed and deployed electronic malicious surveillance tools that violate both the US Constitution and international law. At the same time, WikiLeaks chose to publish only the CIA documentation that proves the existence of such tools

and not the code of the tools themselves.

As Assange explained, “Comparisons can be drawn between the uncontrolled proliferation of such ‘weapons,’ which results from the inability to contain them combined with their high market value, and the global arms trade.” WikiLeaks then collaborated with technology firms such as Microsoft, Apple and Google to assist them in plugging the vulnerabilities in their systems that were being exploited by the CIA.

The WikiLeaks statement also explains that the source who shared the Vault 7 material did so because they wished “to initiate a public debate about the security, creation, use, proliferation and democratic control of cyberweapons. Once a single cyber ‘weapon’ is ‘loose’ it can spread around the world in seconds, to be used by rival states, cyber mafia and teenage hackers alike.”

What this means is this: whoever it was that leaked the Vault 7 CIA trove to WikiLeaks—whether it was Schulte or not—should be recognized as a whistleblower on a par with Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning for their courage and willingness to tell the truth about the criminal policies of US imperialism, instead of being prosecuted and sent to jail.

In his closing argument to the jury, Schulte said that he was singled out by the US government even though “hundreds of people had access to (the information) ... Hundreds of people could have stolen it.” He added, “The government’s case is riddled with reasonable doubt. There’s simply no motive here.”

The Associated Press reported that Attorney Sabrina Shroff, who was Schulte’s adviser during the trial, told his mother that the verdict was a “kick to the gut, the brain and heart.”

The prosecution argued that Schulte, who was a developer of the cyberwarfare tools, was motivated to leak the documents to WikiLeaks because he believed the CIA had disrespected him by dismissing his workplace concerns. They said he tried “to burn to the ground” the very work he had helped the agency to create.

Assistant US Attorney David Denton claimed that Schulte attempted to cover up his crime because he had a list of chores that included an entry that said, “Delete suspicious emails.” US Attorney Damian Williams issued a press release which said, “Schulte has been convicted for one of the most brazen and damaging acts

of espionage in American history.”

As in the case of Assange and the outrageous violation of his rights by the US and UK governments, the mistreatment of Schulte and the dubious character of his conviction has been justified and greeted with enthusiasm by the corporate media. One can search through pages and pages of news reports about Wednesday’s jury verdict and not find a single word of criticism, much less a political analysis, of the purpose and implications of the Vault 7 cyberwarfare tools developed by the CIA.

In typical fashion, the *New York Times* report said that Schulte was arrested after WikiLeaks disclosed the “trove of confidential documents detailing the agency’s secret methods for penetrating the computer networks of foreign governments and terrorists.” As everyone knows by now, especially since the 2013 revelations by former intelligence analyst Edward Snowden, the spying techniques developed by the CIA and NSA are being used against everyone, US citizens and non-citizens alike.



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