

US preparing to seek the arrest of Julian Assange

By Kevin Reed
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According to a CNN report Thursday, the US Department of Justice has prepared the charges it needs to seek the arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has been living in asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London since June 2012.

US officials told CNN reporters that investigators have “proof that WikiLeaks played an active role in helping Edward Snowden, a former NSA analyst, disclose a massive cache of classified documents.”

This represents a distinct shift in the focus of US efforts to persecute the WikiLeaks founder, from targeting the website’s publication of documents and materials provided by Chelsea Manning and other whistleblowers, i.e., acting as a recipient of leaks, to claiming that WikiLeaks was a participant in the leaking of material by Snowden.

Although stopping short of naming Assange, when asked about the matter at a press conference on Thursday, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said, “We’ve already begun stepping up our efforts and whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail.”

CNN spoke with Assange’s lawyer Barry Pollack about the report. Pollack said, “We’ve had no communication with the Department of Justice and they have not indicated to me that they have brought any charges against Mr. Assange.”

Pollack added, “They’ve been unwilling to have any discussion at all, despite our repeated requests, that they let us know what Mr. Assange’s status is in any pending investigations. There’s no reason why Wikileaks should be treated differently from any other publisher.”

The CNN report comes one week after CIA Director Mike Pompeo gave a highly publicized speech before the Center for Strategic and International Studies where

he attacked both Julian Assange and Edward Snowden. Pompeo said during the question and answer period that Assange was not a US citizen and “has no First Amendment freedoms.”

Assange responded with a statement last Friday calling Pompeo’s remarks “dangerous” and an attempt to “stifle speech.” The WikiLeaks statement also compared Pompeo’s effort to demonize Assange to the campaign against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Both the Pompeo speech and the leaked report of impending charges against Assange are clear indications that the Trump administration is moving swiftly to a direct attack on First Amendment rights. Of a piece with its reckless war policies, the administration is attempting to silence any further exposures of the criminal activities of the military-intelligence apparatus of the state.

The timing of the Justice Department charges is connected with the recent confirmation of president-elect Lenín Moreno as the winner of Ecuador’s presidential election over Guillermo Lasso after a recount. The US was planning to exploit a defeat of Moreno, who has defended Assange up to this point and opposed his extradition from the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

The Justice Department is counting on the enthusiastic support of both the US Congress and the subservient corporate media to back its assault on democratic rights. In an interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, Rep. Peter King, R-New York said, “I’m glad that the Justice Department has found a way to go after Assange. He’s gotten a free ride for too long.”

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