

WikiLeaks warns US Justice Department preparing more charges against Assange

By Oscar Grenfell
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The US Justice Department is preparing even more charges against journalist and publisher Julian Assange, WikiLeaks warned Thursday.

The charges, WikiLeaks said, would be based on the testimony of Sigurdur Thordarson, an FBI informant who has previously been convicted of fraud, and who travelled to the United States to answer questions in order to prepare the new charges.

WikiLeaks noted: “Dutch public broadcaster NOS reported that Sigurdur Thordarson was flown to the United States last week where he was ‘comprehensively interrogated,’ in preparation for the filing of a new superseding indictment against Julian Assange by the end of next week.”

The news came the same day as fresh warnings about the deterioration of Assange’s health. Assange’s father, John Shipton, was scheduled to visit his son in Belmarsh Prison but was turned away and told Assange was seeing a doctor for an apparently urgent visit.

“My visit was double-booked, it has been cancelled,” he told Australia’s *Herald Sun*. “[The doctor’s visit] must be at short notice because a double booking occurred.”

Earlier this week, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer warned that Julian Assange could die in prison if his persecution is not stopped immediately.

When ABC reporter Philip Williams asked Melzer, “If your calls are ignored, do you fear that he could actually die in prison?” he replied, “Absolutely, yes. That’s a fear that I think is very real.”

The Trump administration has until June 14 to present its full request to Britain for Assange’s extradition. The current indictment includes 18 charges, over Assange’s role in the exposure of US war crimes and global diplomatic conspiracies, carrying a maximum sentence of 175 years’ imprisonment.

WikiLeaks’ press release, however, stated that the US is likely preparing a superseding indictment. It would include the already unveiled charges, along with new counts against Assange.

The WikiLeaks release continued: “NOS reported that on May 6th this year, FBI Special Agent Megan Brown, who leads the FBI investigation against Assange, travelled to Iceland together with prosecutor Kellen Dwyer from the Eastern District of Virginia, to re-interrogate FBI informant Thordarson with the help of Icelandic police.”

The collaboration between the Justice Department and Thordarson further demonstrates that the US attempts to extradite and prosecute Assange are a political frame-up being conducted in violation of fundamental legal norms.

The FBI informant has no credibility. He has a lengthy record of involvement in illegal spying and state provocations, along with a criminal record encompassing convictions for embezzlement, fraud and sex crimes against minors. Thordarson could not be considered a reliable or honest witness in any prosecution that upheld the right to due process for the accused.

Thordarson, an Icelandic national who was then 17 years old, reportedly sought to ingratiate himself with WikiLeaks, beginning in early 2010, by volunteering for the organisation.

Within a year of his involvement, Thordarson was suspected by WikiLeaks of stealing from the organisation. He was subsequently convicted in Iceland in 2014 of 18 theft-related charges, including for funneling donations meant for WikiLeaks into his private bank account. The media organisation has stated that Thordarson stole up to \$50,000 from them.

In August 2011, Thordarson claims that he contacted the US embassy in Reykjavik, offering to assist in the “ongoing criminal investigation in the United States” against Assange. He was rapidly picked up as an informant by the FBI.

By his own admission, Thordarson met with FBI agents multiple times in Reykjavik between 2011 and 2012. During that period, US authorities flew him to Denmark three times and to the US on one occasion, for secret meetings about WikiLeaks.

Thordarson provided the FBI with eight hard drives of material he claimed was from WikiLeaks. He received

thousands of dollars from the US government.

The FBI informant was involved in a plot by the US authorities to frame Assange on hacking crimes. He claimed that in early 2011, he approached the Lulzsec hacking group, and asked them to help penetrate the computer systems of Icelandic government bodies and corporations.

By the time Thordarson had contacted Lulzsec, its leader Hector Xavier Monsegur, known as “Sabu,” had already agreed to cooperate with the FBI to avoid charges.

Conversations between Thordarson and Lulzsec, were therefore effectively between a hacking organisation directed and controlled by the US government and a dubious Icelandic teenager, already suspected of stealing from WikiLeaks. Assange and WikiLeaks have denied any knowledge of Thordarson’s approaches to Lulzsec.

In June 2011, US authorities issued a warning to Iceland that it faced an imminent cyber attack. In August, a planeload of eight or nine FBI agents arrived in Reykjavik. They had travelled from the Eastern District of Virginia, where a secret grand jury was impanelled against WikiLeaks the previous year. Iceland’s then interior minister, Ögmundur Jonasson, demanded that they leave.

In an interview with Katoikos in 2013, Jonasson revealed that the agents had been sent to seek “our cooperation in what I understood as an operation to set up, to frame Julian Assange and WikiLeaks.” He made clear that the entrapment of Assange was related to the US warning of cyber-hacking operations in 2011.

Jonasson added: “Since they had not been authorised by the Icelandic authorities to carry out police work in Iceland and since a crackdown on WikiLeaks was not on my agenda, to say the least, I ordered that all cooperation with them be promptly terminated, and I also made it clear that they should cease all activities in Iceland immediately.”

Interviewed by NOS, Thordarson indicated that new charges against Assange, based on his testimony, would be over the 2011 frame-up operation. He stated that his recent FBI interviews had focused on his contacts with Monsegur.

In its statement, WikiLeaks warned: “While the case would collapse in the US due to the prosecution’s reliance on testimony by Thordarson and Monsegur, who are not credible witnesses, the United States can conceal their witnesses’ identities during UK extradition proceedings in order to boost their chances of winning.”

It continued: “This will make it impossible for Assange to challenge the credibility of the witnesses during UK extradition proceedings, which will commence on 14 June.”

The preparations to lay additional charges against Assange are the latest stage of what Nils Melzer, the UN special torture rapporteur, branded in a May 31 statement as a “relentless and unrestrained campaign of public mobbing,

intimidation and defamation against Mr. Assange, not only in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom, Sweden and, more recently, Ecuador.”

The WikiLeaks statement is confirmation of Melzer’s warnings that Assange’s fundamental legal and human rights are being trampled upon. Melzer found that Assange had been the victim of “psychological torture.”

In comments to the *Canary* yesterday, Melzer added “The evidence made available to me strongly suggests that the primary responsibility for the sustained and concerted abuse inflicted on Mr. Assange falls on the governments of the United Kingdom, Sweden, the United States and, more recently, also Ecuador.”

He continued: “Accordingly, these governments would be responsible jointly for the foreseeable cumulative effect of their conduct, but also each of them separately for their respective contributions, whether through direct perpetration, instigation, consent, or acquiescence.”

The rapporteur cited the bogus Swedish investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct against Assange, as well as the “secretive grand jury indictment in the United States,” which threatens the WikiLeaks founder with life imprisonment, Ecuador’s illegal termination of his political asylum and the “overt bias against Mr. Assange being shown by British judges since his arrest.”

The international campaign against Assange is the spearhead of governments internationally to abolish fundamental democratic norms, including the right to freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

The unveiling of the US Espionage Act charges against the WikiLeaks founder has opened the floodgates for similar measures against news organisations internationally, demonstrated by Australian Federal Police raids this week against journalists who had revealed government spying and war crimes.

This underscores the crucial importance of building an international movement of workers, students, young people, and all supporters of civil liberties, to secure Assange’s immediate freedom and to defend all democratic rights. Contact the WSWS to take part in this crucial fight.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>