

WikiLeaks: Pentagon ready to discuss Afghan files

August 18 2010, By KARL RITTER , Associated Press Writer



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange prepares to present a seminar at the Swedish Trade Union Confederation headquarters in Stockholm, Sweden, Saturday Aug. 14, 2010. WikiLeaks will publish 15,000 documents from the Afghan war within weeks, Assange told reporters in Stockholm, saying "We proceed cautiously and safely with this material." although U.S. Pentagon says the information would be more damaging to security and risk more lives.(AP Photo / Bertil Ericson / SCANPIX)

(AP) -- WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said Wednesday the Pentagon has expressed willingness to discuss the online whistleblower's request for help in reviewing classified documents from the Afghan war and removing information that could harm civilians.

"This week we received contact through our lawyers that the General Counsel of the U.S. Army says now that they want to discuss the issue," Assange told The Associated Press by telephone. He later corrected himself to say he meant the general counsel of the Pentagon.

Assange added that the contacts have been brokered by the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, or CID.

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman denied any direct contacts between the Pentagon and WikiLeaks. He also said the [Pentagon](#) is not interested in cooperating with WikiLeaks, which has asked for help in reviewing the [documents](#) to purge the names of Afghan informants from the files.

"We are not interested in negotiating some sort of minimized or sanitized version of classified documents," he said.

"These documents are property of the United States government. The unauthorized release of them threatens the lives of coalition forces as well as Afghan nationals."

Asked if CID had brokered contact between defense lawyers and Wikileaks lawyers, Whitman said: "CID is conducting an investigation and I am not going to comment on their investigation."

Assange said Wednesday that "contact has been established" but added it was not clear whether and how the U.S. military would assist WikiLeaks.

"It is always positive for parties to talk to each other," Assange said. "We welcome their engagement."

He reiterated that WikiLeaks plans to release its second batch of secret Afghan war documents within "two weeks to a month."

The first files in its "Afghan War Diary" laid bare classified military documents covering the war in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2010. The release angered U.S. officials, energized critics of the NATO-led campaign, and drew the attention of the Taliban, which has promised to use the material to track down people it considers traitors.

Non-governmental organizations, including the Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, have criticized WikiLeaks as being irresponsible.

WikiLeaks describes itself as a public service organization for whistleblowers, journalists and activists.

"We encourage other media and human rights groups who have a genuine concern about reviewing the material to assist us with the difficult and very expensive task of getting a large historical archive into the public's record," Assange said.

The Australian was in Sweden in part to prepare an application for a publishing certificate that would allow WikiLeaks to take full advantage of the Scandinavian nation's press freedom laws.

That also means WikiLeaks would have to appoint a publisher that could be held legally responsible for the material. Assange said that person would be "either me or one of our Swedish people."

[WikiLeaks](#) routes its material through Sweden and Belgium because of the whistleblower protection offered by laws in those countries. But it also has backup servers in other countries to make sure the site is not shut down, Assange said.

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