

WikiLeaks fights to stay online amid attacks

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, Associated Press



The Internet homepage of Wikileaks is shown in this photo taken in New York, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2010. WikiLeaks' release of secret government communications should serve as a warning to the nation's biggest businesses: You're next. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

(AP) -- WikiLeaks struggled to stay online Friday as corporations and governments moved to cut its access to the Internet, a potentially crippling blow for an organization dedicated to releasing secret information via the web.

Legal pressure increased on the site's founder, Julian Assange, after Swedish authorities cleared an obstacle to his arrest by adding information to a European arrest warrant in response to procedural questions from British officials, who had put his possible arrest on hold for more than a day.

Assange's lawyer said that he is in the U.K. but she hadn't received a warrant by Friday afternoon.

Assange said that his arrest would do nothing to halt the flow of American diplomatic cables being released by his group and newspapers in several countries. Hundreds have been published in redacted form this week and Assange said that all of the cables had already been distributed in a heavily encrypted form to tens of thousands of people.

If something happened to him, he suggested, then the password needed to unencrypt the data would be released and all the secrets would go out at once.

"History will win," Assange said in a web chat with readers of The Guardian newspaper, one of the media organizations helping to coordinate the documents' publication. "The world will be elevated to a better place. Will we survive? That depends on you."

Manchester, New Hampshire-based company [EveryDNS](#), which had been directing traffic to the website [wikileaks.org](#) - stopped late Thursday after cyber attacks threatened the rest of its network. WikiLeaks responded by moving to a Swiss domain name, [wikileaks.ch](#) - and calling on activists for support. Two companies host the Swiss domain name, one of which is in France. The other is in Sweden.

Officials in France moved to ban WikiLeaks from servers there, with Industry Minister Eric Besson calling it unacceptable to host a site that "violates the secret of diplomatic relations and puts people protected by diplomatic secret in danger."

The general manager of the French web hosting company, Octave Klaba, confirmed that it had been hosting WikiLeaks since early Thursday, after a client asked for a "dedicated server with ... protection against

attacks."

He said the company has asked a judge to decide on legality of hosting the site on French soil.

"It is not up to the political realm or to OVH to request or decide the closure of a site, but rather up to the courts," Klabba said.

Wikileaks has been brought down numerous times this week by what appear to be denial-of-service attacks. In a typical such attack, remote computers commandeered by rogue programs bombard a website with so many data packets that it becomes overwhelmed and unavailable to visitors. Pinpointing the culprits is difficult. The attacks are relatively easy to mount, and can be performed by amateurs.

The attacks started Sunday, just before WikiLeaks released the diplomatic cables. To deal with the flood of traffic, WikiLeaks moved to Amazon.com Inc.'s Web hosting facility, which has vast numbers of servers that can be rented at need to meet surges.

Amazon booted the site on Wednesday after U.S. Congressional staffers started asking the company about its relationship to WikiLeaks. The company later said it ousted WikiLeaks because WikiLeaks doesn't own its content and Amazon claimed it could be endangering innocent people by publishing unredacted material.

WikiLeaks has rejected the charge, and says it's fighting to remain online.

"The first serious infowar is now engaged. The field of battle is WikiLeaks. You are the troops," Electronic Frontier Foundation co-founder John Perry Barlow said in a tweet reposted by WikiLeaks to its 300,000-odd followers.

EveryDNS did not immediately respond to phone and e-mail messages seeking further comment, but its move to pull the plug on WikiLeaks' domain isn't fatal by any means. DNS stands for "Domain Name System," and it acts like a phone book for the Internet, translating a [domain](#) name like WikiLeaks.org into a number that points to a specific host computer.

Even if DNS is not working, visitors can still find the site by going to the numerical address.

For a tech-savvy organization like [WikiLeaks](#), loss of DNS support is just a minor annoyance because the site can leap from one name to the next, said Fraser Howard, a researcher with Internet security firm Sophos.

"The whack-a-mole analogy is fairly good," he said.

Still, the constant pressure makes it tough for ordinary Internet users to find the site or browse WikiLeaks' archive of leaked documents, a point raised by one of The Guardian's readers in the chat with Assange. He promised to remedy the situation as soon as possible.

"Rest assured I am deeply unhappy that the three-and-a-half years of my work and others is not easily available or searchable by the general public," Assange said.

The United States has what Attorney General Eric Holder calls "an active, ongoing, criminal investigation" into WikiLeaks' release of the diplomatic cables. Holder said this week that the release jeopardized national security, diplomatic efforts and U.S. relationships around the world.

In Washington, the lawmaker expected to take over the House Judiciary

Committee in January, Republican Lamar Smith of Texas, said he plans to conduct oversight hearings in the matter.

Sen. John Ensign of Nevada introduced a bill to amend the U.S. Espionage Act that would give government prosecutors more flexibility to pursue a criminal case against Assange and his organization, but there was little chance of passing a new law in the remaining weeks of the congressional session.

Assange also risks legal action in his homeland, where Australia says it would detain Assange if possible in response to the warrant filed in the Swedish case by Interpol.

British authorities delayed acting on that warrant after the Swedes specified the maximum possible sentence for only one the most serious charge.

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