

Ecuador says it cut WikiLeaks founder's internet over US election interference¹

Officials confirm government cut off internet access for Julian Assange following a raft of leaked emails targeting Democrats.

Ecuador has confirmed that it has temporarily cut off internet access in its embassy in London to Julian Assange, the founder of the whistleblowing site WikiLeaks, over fears that he was using it to interfere in the US presidential election.

The move followed the publication of leaked emails by WikiLeaks, including some from the Democratic National Committee (DNC) released just before the party's convention in July, and more recently a cache of emails from the account of Hillary Clinton campaign adviser John Podesta.

On Tuesday, officials released a statement saying that the government of Ecuador "respects the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states" and had cut off the internet access available to Assange because "in recent weeks, WikiLeaks has published a wealth of documents, impacting on the US election campaign".

The statement also reaffirmed the asylum granted to Assange and reiterated its intention "to safeguard his life and physical integrity until he reaches a safe place".

Assange's internet access was cut off on Monday morning. It was not immediately clear who was responsible, though a tweet from the site's official account claimed it had been "intentionally severed" by a "state party".

It is not known who perpetrated the hacks that brought the emails to WikiLeaks. Assange's organization styles itself a whistleblowing outfit and claims not to do or encourage any hacking itself.

Yet cybersecurity experts have linked the hack of the DNC emails to hackers tied to the Russian government, leading many – including Clinton's campaign manager, Robby Mook – to allege that Russia is using both hackers and Assange as tools to help rig the presidential election in favor of Donald Trump.

On Saturday, the anti-secrecy organisation released three transcripts of Clinton's paid Goldman Sachs speeches, which her campaign team had long refused to release. The transcripts show how she bantered with the investment bank's executives, which is likely to fuel fears among liberal Democrats that she is too cosy with Wall Street.

WikiLeaks was responsible for the release, in collaboration with several news organizations including the Guardian, of an explosive set of documents leaked by US army private Chelsea Manning, including a video titled Collateral Murder that showed a US air crew killing Iraqi civilians. Manning, who leaked the information, is currently in military prison.

Assange has been confined to the Ecuadorian embassy in London since June 2012, when he sought and was granted asylum by Ecuador. Assange is wanted for questioning in Sweden over an allegation of rape in August 2010, which he denies. The Australian WikiLeaks founder has

¹ https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/oct/19/wikileaks-ecuador-julian-assange-internet-access?CMP=fb_gu

claimed he could be transferred to the US to face potential espionage charges arising from WikiLeaks' publishing activities.

Swedish prosecutors had been due to question Assange at the embassy this week, but last week Ecuador's attorney general said the long-awaited interview would be delayed until 14 November to ensure that Assange's legal team could attend. The interview will be conducted by an Ecuadorian prosecutor, based on a list of questions from the Swedish chief prosecutor and a police investigator, who will be present. The Ecuadorians will later report the findings to Sweden.