

THE IMPLICIT THREAT IN JULIAN ASSANGE'S AMBASSADOR TWEET

The other day, I suggested the Twitter Direct Messages between Wikileaks and Don Jr were underwhelming, in that some of the more damning things we might have expected did not show up in those DMs. Since then, several things have become clear. First, there were some time zone inaccuracies behind the timestamps on one of the most inflammatory claims (that Trump immediately tweeted in response to an October 12 DM from Assange; it probably was 75 minutes). And the password Wikileaks shared with Don Jr had been made available to journalists and may have been passed on by Chuck Johnson, who was currying favor with Assange at the time; that minimizes the possibility that such sharing could be deemed a CFAA or other kind of technical violation though puts Johnson more centrally in this picture.

I didn't say explicitly enough in that post and I should have, though, that I was speaking about Don Jr, not about Wikileaks.

Wikileaks' contributions do show the organization (and Assange in particular, in those DMs we know involved him) to be self-interested and rabidly anti-Clinton. If you haven't known the latter fact to be true since Hillary did some pretty crazy things in 2010, then you're new to this rodeo. That said, the tweets did elicit some righteous betrayal from Barrett Brown, which I totally respect given the price he has paid for the claimed idealism of Wikileaks (see also this story).

It's worth remembering, as Emma Best notes, because they've been under unrelenting surveillance since 2010, "WikiLeaks *knew* the DMs were being monitored in real time. It was inevitable that this would leak. Simply calling this dumb misses the point and ignores the

tradecraft at play." Assange, from the refusal of inside information to the demand for an Ambassadorship, was staging a show, and we should remember that.

That said, I'm far more interested in Assange's subsequent response to the disclosure of the emails, specifically this tweet. In the full DMs released by Don Jr (I think Wikileaks can fairly claim Atlantic took out some context – Atlantic came close to and I think should have just replicated the content of all the DMs, though Brown disagrees), this was the comment Assange made on December 16 asking to be Ambassador.

Hi Don. Hope you're doing well! In relation to Mr. Assange: Obama/Clinton placed pressure on Sweden, UK and Australia (his home country) to illicitly go after Mr. Assange. It would be real easy and helpful for your dad to suggest that Australia appoint Assange ambassador to DC "That's a really smart tough guy and the most famous Australian you have!" or something similar. They won't do it, but it will send the right signals to Australia, UK + Sweden to start following the law and stop bending it to ingratiate themselves with the Clintons. 12/16/16 12:38PM

On Tuesday, Assange posted an ostensible follow-up to that one, renewing his offer to serve as Ambassador.



Julian Assange ♦
@JulianAssange

Following

Dear @DonaldJTrumpJr our offer of being ambassador to the US still stands. I could open a hotel style embassy in DC with luxury immunity suites for whistleblowers. The public will get a turbo-charged flow of intel about the latest CIA plots to undermine democracy. DM me.

#vault8

4:33 PM - 14 Nov 2017

Note, Assange had originally misspelled Don Jr's twitter handle, so deleted and reposted it.

This has been taking as trolling, with Assange's notion that he'd open a hotel in DC, as the Trumps have, with "luxury immunity suites" for whistleblowers.

But even that's not trolling. It's a public renewal, more explicit this time, of Assange's request for a pardon from Trump Sr, though here he drops the "offer" of the claims laundered through Dana Rohrabacher that the emails Assange published to help Trump get elected came from an insider and not Russia. Assange wants the fuck out of his embassy closet, and he's willing to say that explicitly, now, in a public tweet (as Best noted, making this request visible for all).

Remember, Rohrabacher was always clear that someone (or someones, but Chuck Johnson is clearly one of those people) had made clear that Trump wanted this information. Was Don Jr in on that loop?

It's the rest of the tweet that got less attention. First, Assange's promise of "a turbo-charged flow of intel about the latest CIA plots to undermine democracy," a remarkable reference coming as it does in the wake of Mike Pompeo's consideration of an alternative narrative for how Wikileaks got emails (as I noted, scheduled even as John Kelly thwarted Rohrabacher's attempts to meet with Trump directly), not to

mention Trump's screed at John Brennan and others over the weekend.

Assange is agreeing with Trump, even if no one else is, even as the two of them both seek to push an alternative narrative that doesn't have the Russians orchestrating Assange's actions for Trump's benefit, that the CIA is undermining Trump's presidency.

It's the hashtag, though, that most observers missed: Vault 8.

Vault 8 is the name Wikileaks has given for its release – started just Friday – of actual source code for CIA's hacking tools, after long releasing "just" the development notes and manuals for the same tools. I noted then both the way Wikileaks was picking up Shadow Brokers' narrative about Kaspersky, but also the multiple references to Wikileaks having the same set of NSA files as Shadow Brokers had.

I noted last December that with the December 14 Shadow Brokers release of new NSA tools (just days before Assange joked about being ambassador), the persona seemed to be engaging in extortion: "Nice little NSA here, it'd be shame if anything would happen to it." Since that time, Shadow Brokers made good on the threat, leading to global cyberattacks. What Assange seems to be doing is similar: no longer a quid pro quo for safety in DC, but now a threat, using CIA, and tools released in CIA's name, as hostage.

Assange is not offering to release secrets about CIA, but instead weapons leaked or stolen from them. Sure, to the extent the Vault 7 releases haven't already, that'll allow others to attribute CIA attacks. But it'll also devastate the agency and badly undermine US power.

That appears to be where Assange's request for immunity has gotten.