

THE GOVERNMENT'S AMENDED TWITTER ORDER

After successfully petitioning the court to unseal them, EFF has posted the motion to vacate, motion to unseal court records, and motion to unseal motions it filed in the government's effort to get Twitter information on several people in its investigation of WikiLeaks. The first motion to unseal has a detail I didn't know before: Twitter appears to have objected to the government's first request as being too burdensome to provide, so it trimmed its request.

As reflected in the published order, the government originally requested a bunch of Twitter data relating to Wikileaks, Julian Assange, Bradley Manning, Jacob Appelbaum, Birgitta Jónsdóttir, Rop Gonggrijp, and Jacob Appelbaum, covering the period from November 1, 2009 though the request.

But then—presumably after December 14—the government agreed to narrow the request (the four “people” in this passage are Wikileaks, Appelbaum, Jónsdóttir, and Gonggrijp):

As a result of negotiations between Twitter and the government, to reduce the burden on Twitter and to recognize that Twitter does not have certain of the requested information, Movants understand that the government is presently restricting the time period of its request to November 15, 2009-June 1, 2010, and that the scope of the information sought has been limited to contact information for the four account holders, the addresses used each time Movants logged into their accounts, and information regarding DMs between the four Twitter accounts named in the Order.

The time limitation is not all that surprising: the government alleges that Manning's illegal activities began on November 19. And they arrested him on May 29.

It's the other limitations I find interesting: the government is content to get information on the whereabouts (IP Address) of each of the four each time they used Twitter during the period when Manning is alleged to have been leaking to Wikileaks. And, the government is asking to know the timing of each DM the four sent amongst themselves in that period.

Now, presumably the other social media companies the government requested similar information from have since turned it over. In other words, the government may well be happy to limit their request based on what it has already learned from companies less willing to protect their customers' privacy than Twitter.

Nevertheless, at least from Twitter, they seem to be tracking just this small groups activities in intense form.