

WHY DID WIKILEAKS PUBLISH THE TURKISH EMAILS?

Foreign Policy has a gotcha story revealing that WikiLeaks turned down some documents on Russia last year. It is absolutely a gotcha, showing that WikiLeaks refused some Russian-related documents at a time when it was saying it'd happily accept some – or some Republican focused ones.

But given the sourcing, I'm wondering whether it instead shows that WikiLeaks won't accept submissions from certain kinds of sources.

The story is based on "partial chat logs," showing only WikiLeaks' side of the conversation.

WikiLeaks declined to publish a wide-ranging trove of documents – at least 68 gigabytes of data – that came from inside the Russian Interior Ministry, according to partial chat logs reviewed by Foreign Policy.

The logs, which were provided to FP, only included WikiLeaks's side of the conversation.

The language of the gotcha paragraph makes it *appear* as if the chat logs came from a WikiLeaks person because it uses the first person plural discussing what got sent to WikiLeaks.

"We had several leaks sent to Wikileaks, including the Russian hack. It would have exposed Russian activities and shown WikiLeaks was not controlled by Russian security services," the source who provided the messages wrote to FP. "Many Wikileaks staff and volunteers or their families suffered at the hands of Russian corruption and cruelty, we were sure Wikileaks would release it. Assange

gave excuse after excuse.”

Except further down in the article, “the same source” (whose identity or need for anonymity is never explained) describes feeding something else to Assange.

Approached later that year by the same source about data from an American security company, WikiLeaks again turned down the leak. “Is there an election angle? We’re not doing anything until after the election unless its [sic] fast or election related,” WikiLeaks wrote. “We don’t have the resources.”

In other words, this gotcha appears to be coming from the source (who was unwilling to share its side of the conversation with FP, which is itself suspect), not WikiLeaks after all (note, the source *of the files* said today he tried to get WikiLeaks interested in publishing them going back to 2014). And FP’s source appears to have been testing WikiLeaks’ willingness to publish a range of things, including both Russian documents and “data from an American security company.” I would be pretty suspicious of a source who was feeding me unrelated dumps. Julian Assange has also suggested he would happily publish documents from intelligence services – and technically did, with the Syria leaks – but it would be different if WikiLeaks suspected the intelligence service was trying to target it.

So it’s a damning story, but the details of it suggest there may be far more to the story (especially when you remember there was a badly executed American-based attempt to smear Assange as a pedophile last year).

Moreover, the story doesn’t mention something else: that a long profile came out this week substantially validating the second excuse, “we don’t have the resources.” A huge part of Raffi Khatchadourian’s NYer profile of Assange

focuses on how overwhelmed WikiLeaks was last summer trying to get out the DNC emails, and so had to be forced to publish in timely fashion by the Guccifer 2.0 persona.

Meanwhile, a WikiLeaks team was scrambling to prepare the D.N.C. material. (A WikiLeaks staffer told me that they worked so fast that they lost track of some of the e-mails, which they quietly released later in the year.) On several occasions, and in different contexts, Assange admitted to me that he was pressed for time. "We were quite concerned about meeting the deadline," he told me once, referring to the Democratic National Convention.

Here's what I don't get though.

If WikiLeaks was so overwhelmed, why did it publish emails from Turkey's ruling party, which the NYer notes was one of the things contributing to the pressure.

In addition to the D.N.C. archive, Assange had received e-mails from the leading political party in Turkey, which had recently experienced a coup, and he felt that he needed to rush them out.

As I have previously noted, there are some interesting details about the hack-and-leak of these files. All the more so, now, given that Emma (then Michael) Best had a role in publishing them.

The other most celebrated case where inaccurate accusations against Wikileaks may have been counterproductive was last summer when something akin to what happened with the Macron leak did. Wikileaks posted a link to [Emma] Best's archived copy of the AKP Turkish emails that doxed a bunch of Turkish women. A number of people – principally Zeynep Tufekci – blamed

Wikileaks, not Best, for making the emails available, and in so doing (and like the Macron dump) brought attention to precisely what she was rightly furious about – the exposure of people to privacy violations and worse. Best argues that had Tufekci spoken to [her] directly rather than writing a piece drawing attention to the problem, some of the harm might have been avoided.

But I also think the stink surrounding Wikileaks distracted focus from the story behind the curious provenance of that leak. Here's how Motherboard described it.

Here's what happened:

First, Phineas Fisher, the hacker notorious for breaching surveillance companies Hacking Team and FinFisher, penetrated a network of the AKP, Turkey's ruling party, according to their own statement. The hacker was sharing data with others in Rojava and Bakur, Turkey; there was apparently a bit of miscommunication, and someone sent a large file containing around half of akparti.org.tr's emails to WikiLeaks.

WikiLeaks then published these emails on July 19, and as some pointed out, the emails didn't actually seem to contain much public interest material.

Then Phineas Fisher dumped more files themselves. Thomas White, a UK-based activist also known as The Cthulhu, also dumped a mirror of the data, including the contentious databases of personal info. This is where

Best, who uploaded a copy to the Internet Archive, comes in.

Best said [she] didn't check the contents of the data beforehand in part because the files had already been released.

"I was archiving public information," [she] said. "Given the volume, the source, the language barrier and the fact that it was being publicly circulated already, I basically took it on faith and archived a copy of it."

Without laying out all the details here, I think there are some interesting issues about this hack-and-leak that might have gotten more scrutiny if the focus weren't Wikileaks.

One of the details in the Assange profile I didn't know is that Guccifer 2.0 offered up Democratic emails – the suggestion is they were the Podesta ones, though that is not affirmatively claimed – to Best in August.

Someone close to WikiLeaks told me that before Assange published the Podesta e-mails he faced this precise scenario. In mid-August, Guccifer 2.0 expressed interest in offering a trove of Democratic e-mails to Emma Best, a journalist and a specialist in archival research, who is known for acquiring and publishing millions of declassified government documents. Assange, I was told, urged Best to decline, intimating that he was in contact with the persona's handlers, and that the material would have greater impact if he released it first.

The Turkish emails were published (by WikiLeaks

and Best) in July, so just as all this was going down. As Motherboard pointed out, the first batch wasn't all that interesting, and the second one was interesting primarily because of the privacy violation in publishing them.

So if WikiLeaks was so frantic in July, at precisely the time it was scrambling to publish the DNC emails before the Convention, why did it bother publishing the Turkish emails at all? The answer to that may be even more damning than the gotcha that FP presented.

Update: Remember, too, that Assange said he'd publish the ShadowBrokers files last August, but did not.