Iceland summons US envoy over WikiLeaks probe

RAPHAEL G. SATTER - Associated Press - Associated Press

The American ambassador to Reykjavik has been summoned to explain why U.S. investigators are trying to access the private details of an Icelandic lawmaker's online activity as they try to build a criminal case against WikiLeaks.

Revelations that the U.S. Justice Department obtained a court order to examine data held by Twitter Inc. on Birgitta Jonsdottir, an Icelandic parliamentarian who sits on the country's Foreign Affairs Committee, immediately caused consternation in the tiny North Atlantic nation.

"(It is) very serious that a foreign state, the United States, demands such personal information of an Icelandic person, an elected official," Interior Minister Ogmundur Jonasson told Icelandic broadcaster RUV.

"This is even more serious when put (in) perspective and concerns freedom of speech and people's freedom in general," he added.

Jonsdottir is a one-time WikiLeaks collaborator also known for her work on Iceland's media initiative, which aims to turn the island nation into a free speech haven. Jonsdottir told The Associated Press she was too overwhelmed to comment Sunday, but in a recent post to Twitter, she said she was talking with American lawyers about how to beat the order — and was drumming up support in Iceland as well.

U.S. Ambassador Luis E. Arreaga has been summoned for a meeting at Iceland's Foreign Ministry to discuss the issue, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Urdur Gunnarsdottir said Sunday. It was not clear when the meeting was taking place.

U.S. Embassy in Reykjavik said no one there would be available for comment until Monday.

The evolving diplomatic spat illustrates the challenge American prosecutors face as they weigh whether to bring charges against WikiLeaks, an international, tech-savvy operation that has angered and embarrassed Washington with a series of huge leaks of classified information.

The most recent disclosure of thousands of secret State Department cables saw U.S. diplomats being ordered to gather the DNA and fingerprints of their international counterparts, captured backroom dealing over issues such as Guantanamo and rendition, and publicized unflattering assessments of friends and foes alike.

The U.S. says the disclosures have damaged international diplomacy and put the safety of informants and foreign human rights activists at risk. WikiLeaks has dismissed the claims, but Washington has been trying to find a way to prosecute

the group and its leader, 39-year-old Julian Assange, who is currently in England.

A court order unsealed earlier this week revealed that American authorities had gone to court to seek data from Twitter about Assange, Jonsdottir, and others either known or suspected to have interacted with WikiLeaks.

Some of those named in the court order have said they suspect other companies — such as Facebook Inc., Google Inc., and the eBay Inc.-owned Internet communications company Skype — have also been secretly asked to hand over their personal data.

Assange and Jonsdottir have vowed to fight the court order.

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