

Cody Wilson created a gun that can be downloaded and built with a 3D printer - is he too dangerous for Britain?

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He speaks of liberty, freedom and helping society's marginalised. His dedication to civil liberties has brought him a loyal band of followers. Now Cody Wilson, scourge of the campaign to control the proliferation of arms, is coming to London with a new mission: to challenge the global financial system.

Mr Wilson, 25 – named by *Wired* magazine as one of the world's 15 most dangerous people after he created a gun that can be downloaded and built with a 3D printer – is promoting a crypto-currency that would operate outside of government control.

Driven by an extreme libertarian philosophy, the Texan has already achieved notoriety with his vision of putting a gun in the hands of anyone who wants one – and who has a few hundred pounds. The online blueprint for his handgun – the Liberator – has been downloaded 100,000 times since it was released in May. Senior police sources have warned that the gun is one of the biggest threats they face as they try to cut firearms crime in Britain. The US Government embarked on legal action to prevent his organisation – Defense Distributed – from continuing to disseminate the designs.

Calls for stricter gun control laws in Britain followed the a series of raids in Manchester last month that netted what police believed to be the country's first 3D-printed gun parts. Though it was later confirmed that the parts were not from a 3D gun, a man arrested remains on bail until January.

Mr Wilson yesterday laughed off his position at No 14 on the *Wired* list (below Bashar alAssad but above Paula Broadwell, whose relationship with General David Petraeus ended the career of the director of the CIA), saying that his philosophy placed individual liberty above attempts at gun control.

“Do the interests in protecting liberties overcome the fact that bad things may happen? It's a simple calculus: for me it's worth it.”

Mr Wilson described the Liberator as “the gift that keeps on giving”. Despite his current legal battle with the US State Department, he remains unconcerned about its implications. “We can't disseminate the files directly, so I haven't – but it's all over the internet anyway, so it's not an issue.” While the wrangling continues, he has embarked on a new project linked to the cyber currency Bitcoin. Created in 2009 by activists sceptical of the international monetary system, Bitcoin is not tied to any national currency and its value is dependent on online exchanges. Mr Wilson sees it as a “permanent gadfly on the current financial superstructure” and describes its use as “financial freedom of speech”.

Bitcoin has been used as the primary currency in some criminal networks – most notably the Silk Road, an online marketplace for the sale of drugs, forged papers and pornography. It was shut down last month and its alleged founder, Ross Ulbricht – a 29-year-old former physics and engineering student from Austin, Texas – was arrested after agents infiltrated the network that operated on a secret sublayer of the internet. Despite concerns that it is used for money laundering and drug dealing, Bitcoin has been championed by a growing number of US financial institutions and entrepreneurs, including Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss, the twins best known for their long legal dispute with Mark Zuckerberg over the genesis of Facebook.

Mr Wilson is a self-confessed advocate from the “anarchist” wing of the bitcoin movement who is critical of those who have sought to temper the radical philosophy of the currency's founders. While the venture capitalists downplay Bitcoin's illicit links, Mr Wilson has been an unabashed supporter of the market forces that drove the Silk Road. Although the site is gone, Mr Wilson said bitcoin would spawn “1,000 more” Silk Roads in its place.

“It's relatively anonymous, but not completely anonymous like cash. Most deals, for drugs and arms, are still done in cash,” he said. “I want Bitcoin to be completely untaintable. People talk of Silk Road, child porn, trafficking and ask what do you say? Well the biggest money launderers are Standard Chartered and HSBC they have the institutional veil of respectability.”

Mr Wilson has benefited from the concern about state-sponsored snooping raised by Edward Snowden to crowd-source funds for his latest scheme. The Dark Wallet project is an attempt to use anonymity and encryption – which he describes as the few remaining tools available to the “dwindling garrisons of liberty” – to add layers of financial secrecy to bitcoin deals at the same time as the US authorities try to regulate the use of the currency, of which there is thought to be more than \$4bn in circulation. “Bitcoin is what they fear it is,” said Mr Wilson darkly.

Mr Wilson is one of the guest speakers at a bitcoin conference next weekend in London, where he is considered a revolutionary innovator rather than a dangerous radical who threatens to bring US-style gun crime to Britain. Paul Goggins, the Labour MP for Wythenshawe and Sale East where the suspected 3D gun components were found, said that his philosophy should be ignored. “The development of this [3D gun] technology is very worrying,” he said. “It's worrying that it could fall into the hands of the wrong people who could do harm. I shan't be paying any attention and I would advise any person with any sense to ignore him.”