

Wikileaks – is
america being
imprisoned by free
speech?

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Julian Assange, founder of whistle-blowing global organisation Wikileaks, is accused of 'threatening America with the cyber equivalent of thermonuclear war' by publishing government documents online with luring intent. These leaks contain eight of the biggest leaks in history. Some of which include lists of members from racist political parties, and Afghan war logs. Exposing the transgressions of the powerful is a lasting and honourable tradition, often the primary purpose of free press.

However, many of the 'life endangering' leaks that are being sited as due cause for prosecution are insignificant and of the 'Did you know the Pope is a Catholic?' variety and have yet to prove that they pose any manner of threat to civilians of military operations and national security. As many citizens of the US desire transparency, elected officials of public servants and services have no defence for continuing to guard its information from public scrutiny.

Transparency promotes accountability and reduces government corruption and in extreme cases military dictatorship as it often allows citizens of a democracy to have degree of control over their own government. With little transparency there are fewer opportunities for political influence between elections. Citizens can only elect accordingly and for governments to withhold any relevant information would manipulate the voting system.

Therefore Assange opened America's government on behalf of its citizens revealing government deceptions and political domination to promote a participative democracy and improve the overall quality of decision making for the country. However, for a democracy to exist it requires constant

vigilance of the people and their representatives. These leaks were published in violation of the US law and without authorization. This unprocessed information was released without context leaving it exposed to misrepresentation.

Assange has aided terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda largely by given them the “ gift” of diplomatic cables in thousands. The threat of this is that they are exposing the weaknesses within countries governments and security making them subject to ‘ easy’terrorism. Such negligence at the scale of the World Wide Web could significantly endanger the lives of US citizens. Assange’s defence for this not being his intention is contradicted however.

Whilst leaking information from America, Australia, and the UK; he is not leaking information from countries such as North Korea, Iran, Russian or even China. This alludes to Assange targeting particular governments and whilst he cannot be tried for treason, should he be tried for terrorism?

Despite this, American’s have no constructional right to privacy therefore free speech tends to trump privacy. As both are fundamental rights, they cannot be protected when in conflict. Naturally the governments are in favour of privacy to prevent the misdeeds of their past being exposed.

For example, there is a leak that states George Bush, in building a case for war against Iraq falsely claimed than Iraq where attempting to purchase Yellowcake (a chemical used in fuel for nuclear reactors) from Africa. Frankly this is not true. Another leak exposes that America has killed five times the number of civilians killed on 9/11. This ultimately contributed to the

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increased number of Jihadists. To outlaw Wikileaks would be ironic in a democracy as it would restrict freedom of speech and people's right to communicate their opinions and ideas.

It is argued that the leaks provide no threatening data to the public, rather their governments. With thanks to Assange, citizens of America are now aware of policies their government are perusing, policies that place the people at immense risk. Wikileaks is an act journalism and Assange is a journalist therefore Assange and his organization should have the right to freedom of press without exploiting the media. Thus the real threat does not lie with the citizens, but rather the fundamental right to free speech and press and whether as a result of Wikileaks, it will be limited.

Though, is it possible that Assange's right to freedom of press when leaking could negatively affect America in war? Could it have caused more people in the Middle East to enlist with local armed forces? Information in leaks has the potential to destroy their relationships with other countries even if they are not allies. Other countries may now be reluctant to share information with America in fear of it being leaked. This on top of America's desire from transparency could ultimately strip the government of even more power exposing them to even more threats.

George Bush once said " If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear" As of yet no deaths have been directly attributed to the leaks initiating in 2006. Bradley Manning - a soldier of the American army, has accepted 10/22 charges against him. When in court Manning stated that he will plead guilty to sending documents to Wikileaks in violation of the US military

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regulations, but denies “ aiding the enemy” and may still be prosecuted. It is expected that manning will receive a 20 year sentence and dishonourable discharge. Why is Manning being tried so hard?

Is it to make an example, to remind us of the consequences when exposing those in control? To conclude, I have outlined that as few leaks have the potential to risk lives; many more have little significance in this respect. Both privacy and freedom of speech cannot be protected when in conflict.

However, in a case of democracy freedom of speech should outweigh privacy greatly. Citizens have a right to be aware of their governments and without this awareness democracy cannot exist. But, in doing this do they have the right to disregard the privacy of others?