

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم وېر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

http://tech.mit.edu/V130/N58/wikileaks_cp.html

Opinion: WikiLeaks serves the global community by keeping governments in check

By Nils Molina
December 3, 2010

Nihilist and criminal labels aside, WikiLeaks has done a lot of good. In 2007, WikiLeaks published the Kroll Report, a secret report detailing extensive government corruption by the richest man in Kenya, Daniel arap Moi. The news came out shortly before the Kenyan national election and received intense airtime on Kenyan TV. According to a Kenyan intelligence report, the leak shifted the vote by 10 percent, changing the result of the election.

In 2009, WikiLeaks published documents showing suspicious loans carried out by the Kaupthing Bank just before the Icelandic financial crisis. Public uproar over the banking procedures that WikiLeaks exposed galvanized Iceland into enacting the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative. The proposal, unanimously passed by the Icelandic parliament, strengthened free speech protections, turned Iceland into an “international transparency haven,” and established the Icelandic Prize for Freedom of Expression.

In 2010, WikiLeaks released the “Collateral Murder” Baghdad airstrike video. In the video, an American helicopter crew, mistaking a camera for an RPG, kills two Reuters journalists along with other armed and unarmed men. Soon after, three unarmed men rush

out of a van to help a wounded survivor and are promptly killed by the Americans. Finally, a few armed men enter a building. The Americans destroy the building with missiles, killing both armed and unarmed people. In its report, the American military labeled everyone killed, except for the Reuters journalists, as insurgents. The video clarifies what the U.S. military means by “insurgent,” putting the war in a different light from a humanitarian perspective. And from a strategic perspective, is killing Iraqi civilians with overwhelming military force an effective way to establish a peaceful, democratic Iraqi state?

WikiLeaks helped expose the looting of Kenya, the corruption of a banking system and sloppy killings committed by the U.S. military. WikiLeaks should be lauded for using truth to pressure these institutions to re-evaluate themselves. Thinking that the U.S. military does not need outside scrutiny to effectively serve the public is as foolish as thinking that the MIT administration can by itself design a good undergraduate dining plan. The entrenched bureaucracy that generates military decisions can fail spectacularly, with history providing examples ranging from the Vietnam War to the often irrational Soviet military build-up. Leaking information that changes how one evaluates a war is free press doing its job. Transparency matters.

In July, WikiLeaks released its most controversial leak yet, the Afghan War Diary. Unlike children playing with fire, before the release WikiLeaks’s volunteer journalists pored through the documents, trying to minimize the harm they could cause. They withheld 15,000 documents naming informants, with editor Julian Assange saying these will be reviewed “line by line” to remove the names of “innocent parties who are under reasonable threat.” Before public release, WikiLeaks provided *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *Der Spiegel* with the documents. All three newspapers decided to publish the leaks, with *Der Spiegel* stating that “the editors in chief of Spiegel, The New York Times and the Guardian were ‘unanimous in their belief that there is a justified public interest in the material.’”

U.S. officials responded to the massive leak by saying it endangers countless lives. But so far there is no evidence that the leak has cost a single American life, and recently a NATO official told the CNN there had not been a single case of an Afghan needing protection because of the leak. The Afghan War Diary enumerates casualties, reveals increased Taliban attacks and examines Pakistani and Iranian involvement. In view of the thousands of lives and trillions of dollars already lost in Afghanistan, the grim picture the

Diary paints for the public is far more important than the unsubstantiated risks it poses to the current U.S. military effort.

Only a month ago, WikiLeaks released a huge batch of documents related to the Iraq War. The documents are still being processed. Already, the Iraq Body Count project has identified 15,000 Iraqi civilian deaths from the logs. Important information about torture, rape, murder and private contractors is coming to light. For example, the leak suggests that Danish soldiers knowingly handed over prisoners for mistreatment, spurring Denmark to begin an investigation.

Keith Yost is correct in asserting a few of WikiLeaks's documents go too far. Publishing a study in 2008 detailing vulnerabilities in certain U.S. countermeasures against IEDs was probably unjustifiably risky, even though by then the U.S. had mostly phased out those countermeasures. But focusing on these isolated, relatively insignificant details ignores the big picture. Institutions, like the U.S. government, classify too much, letting them hide wrongdoing. On the whole, WikiLeaks does the world a great service by revealing the wrongdoing and pressuring these institutions to improve.

The next big leak will reveal material from pharmaceutical companies, finance firms and energy companies. Assange claims the leak will make it easier to run a good business. For example, if businesses that cut milk powder with melanin are exposed, Assange argues, other businesses will not need to sell fake milk powder to remain competitive. Just like a business, the government should respond to the leaks by becoming more open and honest, better hiding the little information that must remain secret and re-evaluating its bureaucratic activities. WikiLeaks is a resilient and powerful organization of journalists. Designating it as a terrorist group, as the incoming chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee has suggested, or engaging in an expensive international chase, as Keith Yost recommends, would be a public relations nightmare.