

# WikiLeaks - the state persecutes its idealists

1. The premise of the WikiLeaks project is that the exposure of governmental and corporate secrets is the critique of those parties. The project and its manifesto - written by Julian Assange before WikiLeaks took off - is concerned with fighting conspiracies, acts carried out in hiding, away from the prying eyes of the public. WikiLeaks detects these hidden agendas in authoritarian regimes and - as a tendency - in some democratic governments.<sup>1</sup> Against those tendencies, WikiLeaks does not argue its point or its political position, since it assumes that exposing the secrets of those who are in power suffices to upset the suppressed masses: “Authoritarian regimes give rise to forces which oppose them by pushing against the individual and collective will to freedom, truth and self realization. Plans which assist authoritarian rule, once discovered, induce resistance. Hence these plans are concealed by successful authoritarian powers.”<sup>2</sup> What WikiLeaks aims to accomplish is to reveal these concealed plans so that democratic resistance for freedom, truth and self realization is induced. According to WikiLeaks, if the people do not rebel, it is because they do not know about the sinister plans of their governments.
2. WikiLeaks claims that authoritarian rule and authoritarian tendencies within democratic governments are characterised by their operation in hiding. However it is no secret that profit is the driving motive behind corporations, that the USA and its allies are fighting deadly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for their own national interests, and that the US government considers WikiLeaks to be an enemy of the state. These things are not suppressed information; on the contrary, they are openly declared and discussed. That Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt for 30 years, that his police tortured and suppressed any opposition using a 30 year state-of-emergency law, that the USA backed this rule because of its interests in the region, that the EU negotiated a free trade agreement with the Egyptian regime and that the EU cherished Gaddafi's Lybia for its contribution to keeping refugees from entering Europe: all this is public record. There are also actions and policies by authoritarian and democratic governments which are secret, such as extra-legal killings, torture, intelligence gathering, renditions and some deals with other states or corporations. But this does not imply that these governments' rule is primarily characterised by what their subjects do not know about. On the contrary, a regime which tortures its enemies to intimidate them wants them to know about it, so that they shy away from their plans.
3. WikiLeaks proposes that transparency leads to good governance, to a better life for the subjects. However, if a government truthfully reports that the current debt crisis requires large scale cuts to social services, this is transparency; if the US government openly declares its enmity to WikiLeaks, this is transparency; if the law informs someone that his material needs count only insofar they are effective demand, this is transparency; if a state mobilises its population to militarily defeat the mobilised population of another state, this is transparency. Transparency in itself does not prevent harm: rather, most of the misery is wrought in the open.<sup>3</sup>
4. In characterising “successful authoritarian powers” as anxious to hide their own character for fear of resistance, WikiLeaks disregards the purposes of domination. Before asking how something is achieved, one must determine its intended purpose. Both modern authoritarian and democratic states demand much more than merely to maintain themselves. Since a strong economy is the basis of any state's power, especially so under capitalism, the state's

- subjects are not merely tedious masses but useful material.<sup>4</sup> States spend considerable effort fostering their economies, jealously compare GDPs - the overall economic activity of one country - with other states, closely watch currency exchange rates and stock indices: they compare the economic performance of their populations because it is the basis of their power. But the population's contribution to the might of the state does not end with its economic activity. The state wants its subjects to cherish it, to support its policies.<sup>5</sup> When it is deemed necessary the state even demands that its population go to war. These purposes cannot be achieved secretly, they must be publicised.
5. WikiLeaks' practical critique of governments across the globe is driven by its appreciation for the institution of government as such. WikiLeaks aims to induce a resistance which aims to "shift regime behavior"<sup>6</sup>, not to end regimes. The prospect of getting rid of domination - i.e. systematic and forceful rule - and the idea that regimes are only necessary because of the conditions they establish, is not present in WikiLeaks publications or actions. Accusing the WikiLeaks project of being anarchist, possibly opposed to governments and corporations in principle, is wrong. On the contrary, WikiLeaks' activism is driven by the assumption that the democratic state as such deserves defense and not fundamental critique.
  6. WikiLeaks promotes the raw publication of unpublished data, without commentary, since the data itself ought to spark resistance. Yet, it is not information - facts - as such that gets people to oppose certain policies - but how people interpret these facts. The slaughter of Iraqi civilians by US troops is interpreted by opponents of the war in Iraq as yet another reason to stop the war. Others might take away the message that war had ugly sides yet that those are unfortunately necessary, that the insurgents are to blame since they would hide behind civilians, that those killed should not be out in the streets in a war zone or that those "subhumans" deserve no better. The facts only provide the material for verdicts, they do not determine verdicts. This is especially so when most of the data that reached the public through WikiLeaks only confirmed what everybody knew already: "This is a description of the Afghan War that a bright 10-year-old could have given you without the benefit of [...] 90,000 leaked documents."<sup>7</sup> All that previously unknown facts can provide is a necessary precondition for new verdicts that might be impossible to make without them.
  7. WikiLeaks' ideal of a state is one that is measured by the principles of the democratic state.<sup>8</sup> A modern democratic state presents itself as a service to its subjects and as an expression of the will of those subjects. It grants its subjects rights and freedoms, it asks its subjects to select its agents, it provides basic infrastructure for their economic activities and it provides some social security. That the state establishes the conditions which force its subjects to rely on the state does not change this fact. WikiLeaks agrees with these principles: "Better scrutiny leads to reduced corruption and stronger democracies in all society's institutions, including government, corporations and other organisations."<sup>9</sup> Restricting oneself to battling corruption in government and corporations implies that it is not the principles of these organisations which ought to be blamed for the observed misery, but the deviation from those principles.<sup>10</sup> Thus, WikiLeaks' fight against corruption indicates support in principle for those organisations once they are free of corruption. When WikiLeaks agrees with the US Supreme Court about "effectively expos[ing] deception in government"<sup>11</sup>, this is no rhetorical trick - they both want effective institutions, the institutions of the current social order. Both WikiLeaks and the US constitution share the ideal of a democratic, capitalist state which fosters its citizens' "pursuit of happiness".
  8. Some of WikiLeaks' distrust of those who are in power is also institutionalised in the state. The institutional set-up of the state reveals a considerable lack of trust in those who hold

office, it reveals the suspicion that the state's agents might secretly (or openly) abuse their power. Law requires regular elections and thus ensures that the collective will of the people corresponds to that of politicians.<sup>12</sup> Some countries even have term limits for the highest offices in order to prevent one person from clinging to power. Law mandates a division of powers between the government, parliament and the courts so that no branch can appropriate the power vested in it for purposes other than those in their job description. Law guarantees freedom of press, speech and assembly and thus allows the democratic opposition to voice its concerns. Also, presidential candidates sometimes pledge to “strengthen whistleblower laws to protect federal workers who expose waste, fraud, and abuse of authority in government”<sup>13</sup>. The democratic state is a state of law and as such suspicious about its agents who exercise this law.

9. This institutionalised distrust is not without reason. First, these agents are people who - like everyone else - have private interests, yet their job is to maintain the order in disregard of particular private interests. If bourgeois society is a society of competing subjects then recruiting from this society carries some risk. These agents might abuse their power to pursue their own agenda, by accepting bribes or by bending law to benefit their friends.<sup>14</sup> It is this kind of misapprehension of positions of power against the state's rules, regulations and separation of power is aimed. It is also this kind of corruption against which people like the US president want to mobilise whistleblowers.
10. The second reason for distrust is that the checks and balances of a democratic state get in the way of effective government. A limit on the power of the government is a limit on its ability to do its job. The checks and balances are blind towards what the government tries to accomplish and thus may hinder it in pushing through policies which are in the national interest. This is why politicians and other agents of the state who have the highest admiration for democracy and the rule of law regularly bend the rules - illegal wiretaps, rendition, etc. Whether these kind of transgressions are treated as violations of the principles of the state or not cannot be decided a priori. This depends on the success of these policies. Avoiding a possible conviction for such a digression (whether it is for personal enrichment or doing the best for the nation without following the law) is one reason why state agents may choose to try to keep certain actions away from public.
11. Thus the US campaign against WikiLeaks, which is backed by its international allies and both big parties in the USA, is aimed against a project which is fundamentally supportive of the state as such. It is running a campaign against people who have the highest admiration for its principles. The people who are declared enemies of the state are driven to their actions by their admiration for the principles of the state.
12. It could seem like a miscalculation on the end of the US administration and other governments to attack WikiLeaks: both seem to be in favour of the same principles. However, there is a fundamental difference as to what role these principles play for both sides. For WikiLeaks and its supporters democratic principles are the first and grounding principles of the state, it is what makes the state. For the state, on the other hand, these principles are means of domination. Just because the state provides services to its citizens does not imply its role is restricted to this provision. If that were the case, no coppers, courts and prisons would be needed. Just because the state is a state of law and principles, just because it seeks the support of its subjects, just because it aims to use the private interests of its subjects productively for its own power, does not mean that its rule is no domination and requires no secrecy. It still suppresses interests which fundamentally oppose its rule. In general, it presents boundaries to any interest of its subjects: one may pursue one's own interest - but in accordance with the law.<sup>15</sup> Put differently, just because

the state fosters and protects some legitimate private interests, this does not imply - contrary to WikiLeaks' belief - that its ultimate goal is to guarantee the well-being of its subjects: benevolent domination is a contradiction.

13. Second, the publication of the diplomatic cables and internal military reports by WikiLeaks does threaten the US internationally. Public statements by agents of the state - especially within the realm of international diplomacy - are considered to be expressions of policy. An open critique of another state or its personnel is an attempt to show this state its limits or to probe these limits. The official account of one's own war efforts is aimed to send a message to friend and foe.<sup>16</sup> By publishing internal US memos WikiLeaks made policy for the USA, it made the US government say things it did not want to say in public, sending all kinds of messages to governments across the globe. The point here is not whether these cables contain news in terms of factual statements. The point is that the US government did not want to say these things to its allies and enemies openly; WikiLeaks made the US government say it regardless. WikiLeaks forced the hand of US foreign policy by publishing those memos. In reaction the state interprets this attack as a very principle questioning of its rule - regardless of WikiLeaks' intentions.
14. The US campaign against WikiLeaks is conflicted. On the one hand, there are calls by some politicians for Assange's assassination and the US administration is looking for legal loopholes to charge Assange. Bradley Manning - the alleged whistleblower who leaked the cables and other internal US documents - is likely to rot in prison for a long time to make an example of those who threaten the state. On the other hand, WikiLeaks still is not illegal in the USA, and hardly any regard has been given to e.g. the New York Times, which collaborated with WikiLeaks on the release of the diplomatic cables.<sup>17</sup> The state does want to shut down WikiLeaks but it hesitates to dismantle the freedom of press in the process. The state want citizens like Julian Assange, but these good citizens should consider the reality of the state they are subject to before acting on their idealist conception.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Today, with authoritarian governments in power in much of the world, increasing authoritarian tendencies in democratic governments, and increasing amounts of power vested in unaccountable corporations, the need for openness and transparency is greater than ever.” <https://wikileaks.org/About.html>

<sup>2</sup> WikiLeaks Manifesto, <https://cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> WikiLeaks posits an opposition between hoarding information and publishing it: “By definition, intelligence agencies want to hoard information. By contrast, WikiLeaks has shown that it wants to do just the opposite.” However, intelligence agencies do publish information, that is, when it suits their agenda. They use information to embarrass or intimidate competing states and their governments. It is not its admiration for WikiLeaks' idealism of democracy which caused China to promote WikiLeaks as a candidate for the Nobel peace price; China proposed WikiLeaks because it embarrasses the USA and in order to demonstrate the function of the Nobel price as a title by the USA and its allies against its competitors.

<sup>4</sup> There are indeed some states where the population is of no use to the state since these states have their economic basis simply in exporting their natural resources. In such states the population is mainly kept away from the sources of revenue for the state. The Sudan is, besides most countries in the “Third World”, such a state which expects little of its population and has little to offer to it, because it cannot compete on the world market against successful economic powers such as the USA, the EU and China.

<sup>5</sup>

Democratic states even invite their populations to choose the agents of the state. See “You mean they actually vote for the lizards?” in kittens #1 available at <http://www.junge-linke.org/en/you-mean-they-actually-vote-for-the-lizards>

<sup>6</sup> WikiLeaks Manifesto

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/9348/>

<sup>8</sup> “In its landmark ruling on the Pentagon Papers, the US Supreme Court ruled that ‘only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government.’ We agree. Publishing improves transparency, and this transparency creates a better society for all people. Better scrutiny leads to reduced corruption and stronger democracies in all society's institutions, including government, corporations and other organisations. A healthy, vibrant and inquisitive journalistic media plays a vital role in achieving these goals. We are part of that media.”

<https://wikileaks.org/About.html> (emphasis added)

<sup>9</sup> <https://wikileaks.org/About.html>

<sup>10</sup> “Similarly, some intelligence services have an obligation to go about their activities to the best of their ability and that, sometimes, involve secrecy. But, what is not a right, is for a General or, Hillary Clinton, to say that they want to use the criminal law on every person in the country, to stop talking about embarrassing information, that has been revealed from her institution or from US military. She does not have the right to proclaim what the worry is, that's a matter for the court.” Julian Assange in an interview on “Frost over the World” on Al Jazeera (21.12.2010).

<sup>11</sup> <https://wikileaks.org/About.html>

<sup>12</sup>

This goes both ways. The leadership shall not stray too far from the people and the people shall realise where the national problems lie. See “You mean they actually vote for the lizards?” in kittens #1 available at <http://www.junge-linke.org/en/you-mean-they-actually-vote-for-the-lizards>

<sup>13</sup> [http://change.gov/agenda/ethics\\_agenda/](http://change.gov/agenda/ethics_agenda/)

<sup>14</sup> To avoid a misunderstanding: If certain policies benefit some people more than others this does not violate the purpose of democratic rule. However, if policy is made solely to benefit a particular group in disregard of the national interest, it generally does.

<sup>15</sup> See “Private property, exclusion and the state” in kittens #0 available at <http://www.junge-linke.org/en/private-property-exclusion-and-the-state>

<sup>16</sup> Additionally, allies of the USA started to wonder in public whether it was safe to share sensitive information with US officials in light of the leaks. This might limit the US' ability to collect this kind of information.

<sup>17</sup> The difference in treatment of the NYT and WikiLeaks also shows what kind of press the state has an interest in. As a “fourth branch of government” the press exposes inefficiencies and outright corruption. On the other hand, the NYT insists - against all evidence to the contrary - on not calling interrogation tactics by US troops “torture”, underlining its pledge of allegiance to the American state. WikiLeaks, on the contrary, is not obstructed by patriotism in demanding its ideal of the state to be fulfilled.