



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 28, 2012

Documents Show Lieberman, King Behind Financial Blockade of WikiLeaks

According to European Commission documents released Tuesday by [WikiLeaks](#), two high-ranking U.S. politicians are responsible, at least in part, for a financial blockade that the organization claims has cut off 95 percent of its revenue. Those politicians are Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), both of whom pressured MasterCard, and possibly Visa, into refusing to process payments to WikiLeaks, the documents reveal. MasterCard and Visa together control 97 percent of European Union (EU) card transactions.



There is no question that WikiLeaks is a thorn in the side of the U.S. government, revealing, in gory detail, how its world-girdling empire really operates. Nevertheless, the United States has never charged WikiLeaks or any of its staffers with a crime, and neither has any other country. Thus, there can be no justification for U.S. or foreign officials to engage in an extralegal campaign against the group; but that is exactly what they are doing.

“WikiLeaks,” writes the *Guardian*’s [Glenn Greenwald](#), “has been crippled by a staggering array of extra-judicial punishment imposed either directly by the U.S. and allied governments or with their clear acquiescence.”

Shortly after the group’s 2010 release of U.S. diplomatic cables, it was hit with massive cyber attacks. Lieberman, then the chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, publicly and privately — and successfully — leaned on Amazon.com to terminate its hosting services to WikiLeaks. The cyber attacks continued, and the group was forced off all U.S. web hosting services. The U.S. government responded to these clearly criminal acts with indifference.

“Meanwhile,” Greenwald adds, “Chairman Lieberman’s public pressure, by design, also led to the destruction of WikiLeaks’ ability to collect funds from supporters. Master Card and Visa both announced they would refuse to process payments to the group, as did America’s largest financial institution, Bank of America. Paypal not only did the same but froze all funds already in WikiLeaks’ accounts.”

Lieberman, it turns out, was not relying solely on his public statements to convince these institutions to starve WikiLeaks. The just-released documents show that he and King were also privately in contact with MasterCard, at the very least.

In a submission to the European Commission, which was considering whether or not to open a formal investigation into Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, MasterCard stated that it had chosen to deny payments to WikiLeaks because “it is evident that any affiliation with an organization causing damage to the national interests of several nations involved in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and



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possibly putting lives needlessly at risk, will be damaging for the public perception of MasterCard and consequently damage MasterCard's goodwill or its [trade]Marks."

Although the company denied that it had "any contacts with public authorities" prior to its decision or that it had "act[ed] upon request from any public authorities," it noted that it had "had several conversations with the FBI, U.S. Treasury and the Department of Homeland Security" about the potential for cyber attacks. More to the point, it stated that "MasterCard Incorporated had conversations with certain Congressional staff (i.e. Chairman Lieberman and Chairman King's staff)." Given that Lieberman had been publicly calling for a banking blockade of WikiLeaks and that King had (according to WikiLeaks) "tried to formally designate WikiLeaks as a foreign terrorist organization, have its staff listed as 'enemy combatants,' and have WikiLeaks put on a U.S. Treasury blacklist," it's not hard to imagine how those conversations went. (Treasury, by the way, refused to put WikiLeaks on the blacklist because it said it had no grounds for doing so.) Whether it took action before or after speaking to U.S. officials, MasterCard certainly did what they wanted.

Visa did not name any specific officials to whom it had spoken, but it did state that company policy was to "prohibit the use of the Visa system for illegal purposes either in the jurisdiction of the merchant ... or the jurisdiction of the cardholder." Thus, because WikiLeaks was alleged to have published classified U.S. documents, Visa refused to process any donations to the group despite the fact that it had not been charged with, let alone convicted of, any crime. Again Washington got its desired outcome without having to bother itself with legal proceedings.

Lieberman's office denies that the senator had any contact with either credit card company. In an e-mail to *The New American*, spokesperson Leslie Phillips stated that the information contained in the EC documents was "incorrect." "Neither Senator Lieberman nor anyone on his staff spoke, wrote, called, emailed, or skyped with any representative from Mastercard or Visa," Phillips wrote.

WikiLeaks has also [discovered](#) that Bank of America, the founder of Visa, "commissioned, through Washington lawyers Hunton & Williams, a consortium of three U.S. intelligence contractors, including HBGary, to propose a systematic ... \$2 million/month multi-pronged attack to hack and smear WikiLeaks" and sympathetic journalists and lawyers. And who recommended HBGary to Bank of America? "Contacts within the U.S. Department of Justice."

As a result of the banking blockade, WikiLeaks is now nearly broke and has been forced to suspend publication and devote its energies to raising funds and fighting the blockade. If its ability to raise money continues to be denied, it may well cease to exist — precisely the denouement for which Lieberman, King, and other U.S. officials are hoping.

"The most powerful players in the banking industry have shown themselves to be a politicized arm of Washington," remarked WikiLeaks. "This collusion has occurred outside of any judicial or administrative process."

Then again, if the president of the United States can order the assassination of anyone he chooses, why shouldn't he or his surrogates be able to summarily destroy a private organization — especially one that dares to shine a light on the United States' clandestine activities?

The U.S. government's attempt to wipe out WikiLeaks, if successful, will set an alarming precedent. As Greenwald observed, "What possible political value can the internet serve, or journalism generally, if the U.S. government, outside the confines of law, is empowered ... to cripple the operating abilities of any group which meaningfully challenges its policies and exposes its wrongdoing?"



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