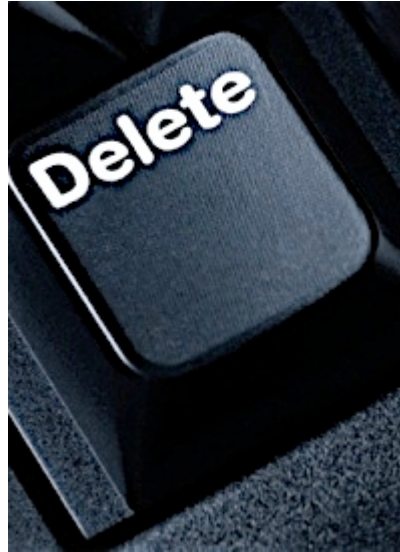




Censoring WikiLeaks — Then the Internet?

With the arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in London, what has been called the “first information war” has taken a critical turn. The U.S. government, furious at the publication of thousands of classified and confidential pieces of diplomatic correspondence, has every intention of making an example of Assange to deter other would-be tamperers with American state secrets. WikiLeaks, be it recalled, has also provided a window on U.S. actions in Iraq by releasing classified videos showing U.S. helicopters machine-gunning civilians and committing other atrocities. Wikileaks has certainly enraged the American empire before, but now, it seems, Rome-on-the-Potomac is determined to strike back.



First, the charges against Mr. Assange: From media reports, it would appear that he has been charged with statutory rape. In point of fact, the accusations center on claims by two women that he had “unprotected” sexual relations with them without their explicit consent (consent, that is, to be unprotected), which in Sweden is a crime. Assange is certainly no saint, but there can be no doubt whatsoever that the international arrest warrant and subsequent continent-wide manhunt was driven by politics, not a disinterested desire by the British and the Swedes to see justice served. The U.S. government has also indicated an intention to extradite and prosecute him for revealing state secrets — all this even though he has so far been charged with no crime.

Equally disturbing has been the systematic campaign against WikiLeaks, whereby banks, credit cards, and online giants like PayPal and Amazon.com have frozen WikiLeaks’ accounts and refused to honor any payments to the online whistleblower. All of this has unfolded before a backdrop of relentless “denial-of-service” cyber attacks on WikiLeaks, which have forced the website to shut down repeatedly and move from server to server.

All of this is being orchestrated by the U.S. government, although the Powers That Be in the national security community will doubtless take elaborate steps to hide their fingerprints. The campaign against WikiLeaks is the first-ever act of deliberate, systematic censorship of the Web by the U.S. government, against a journalistic organization that has only been doing what journalists have traditionally done without government reprisal, at least in the United States: uncover the truth, including classified government malfeasance. For it was once understood in America that, if the government is allowed to draw the veil of state secrecy over criminal or immoral acts, and commit reprisals against any who expose them, it has given itself a writ of impunity both from statutory and natural law.

Our concern is less for the ham-handed persecution of Mr. Assange and his organization — though it is disturbing enough — than for the precedent it is likely to set. The U.S. government has shown that it is not only willing but capable of censoring Internet content and of punishing those deemed guilty of



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on December 8, 2010

collaboration with purveyors of censored content. It is a very small step from the crusade against WikiLeaks to broader efforts to purge the Internet of all dissent labeled as “hate speech.” It is not at all difficult, for example, to imagine the federal government, during the coming financial collapse, barring all online criticism of the Federal Reserve, in the interest of preserving financial stability (i.e., the status quo).

The American Empire is, of course, already in severe crisis, teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, flailing desperately to preserve its global hegemony in the face of a failing economy and rising challenges in China, India, and elsewhere. America has tried censorship and other extreme means of suppressing dissent before — and always in times of crisis. Lincoln shut down critical papers and jailed recalcitrant lawmakers during the Civil War, and Wilson tried (with less success) to do the same during World War I. The War on Terror lacks the scale and drama of the Civil War or the two world wars, but it is perhaps all the more deadly to American liberty for its duration and low intensity. America has been on a war footing for almost a decade now, and the changes to our culture and our laws have been devastating. As the War on Terror enters its second decade, expect the federal government to crack down more and more on dissent, especially online dissent.

The Julian Assange saga has been likened to Daniel Ellsberg’s 1971 leak of the infamous “Pentagon papers,” which discredited the federal government’s version of events in Vietnam, and helped to hasten the end of that unhappy conflict. Would that the revelations of WikiLeaks opened more eyes to the nature of modern American realpolitik, which cares little for the well-being of American citizens and is focused on protecting the federal government and her special interests!

The Internet has been the greatest tool for freedom in modern times. If it is censored, controlled, regulated, or otherwise politically neutralized, the cause for freedom will take a gigantic step backwards. Of this we may be sure: the future of the free and open Internet will depend on the outcome of the struggle between WikiLeaks and the federal government.

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