



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 1, 2012

WikiLeaks Sees Financial Spigot Re-Open, Wounds Itself on Satiric Hoax

The Internet-based whistleblower website WikiLeaks appears to have won some battles to recover its financial infrastructure in the past few weeks, winning the first stage of a [legal battle in Iceland with Visa Corporation](#) and [gaining a French source for accepting donations](#) in the [Fund for Defense of Net Neutrality](#) (FDN²). But a WikiLeaks [satire](#) of former *New York Times* executive editor Bill Keller — admitted as a phony by WikiLeaks July 29 on its [Twitter feed](#) — threatens to undo much of the organization's



credibility. FDN² claims that banks and credit card companies are legally bound to honor the French-based ["Carte Bleue"](#) transfer system.

Most U.S.-based financial service providers, such as Visa, MasterCard, PayPal, Western Union, and Bank of America, have banned use of their networks to transfer funds to WikiLeaks, likely because of U.S. government pressure. The French free speech organization FDN² allows donors a gateway to give to the funds-starved whistleblower organization, which has claimed that 95 percent of its operating income was wiped out by the financial boycott.

In a splash-screen on the [WikiLeaks website](#), Australian-born founder Julian Assange continues to make a financial appeal in a video message, claiming: "During this time, we have withstood attacks from military and intelligence organizations, lawsuits, imprisonment, cyber-warfare, and high-level calls for our assassination. But now we face our greatest challenge: A politically motivated banking blockade led by Visa, Mastercard, Paypal, Western Union and the Bank of America. This blockade has left us with just five percent of our financial lifeline. It has wiped out, successfully, 95 percent of your support."

The [forgery or satire](#) of the *New York Times* — it's unclear which was the intent in WikiLeaks' stormy relationship with the establishment newspaper — had Keller issuing a plea for tolerance of the whistleblower organization (a phony based upon a [real New York Times](#) column by Keller). The WikiLeaks [phony](#) claimed:

The backroom pressures by the Obama Administration's State Department to expand its financial blockade targeting WikiLeaks to include news organizations that host information from their trove of pilfered documents goes too far.... Even after WikiLeaks's first victory against Visa in Iceland, I still must urge Visa, Mastercard, and American Express to take a similar stand against the use of financial embargos to prohibit supporters from contributing or subscribing to media organizations protected by the First Amendment and free speech laws.

WikiLeaks acknowledged the falsification in a July 29 [tweet](#): "WikiLeaks @wikileaks Yes. We admit it."



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WikiLeaks (Assange & co) and our great supporters [were] behind the successful NYTimes banking blockade hoax on @nytkeller.”

Defenders of WikiLeaks such as civil libertarian and *Salon* magazine blogger Glenn Greenwald [say](#) that such a satire shouldn't hurt WikiLeaks' reputation, though he acknowledged it will be used as a cudgel by the organization's opponents:

I don't think it damages their credibility. For one thing, they have a perfect 100 percent stellar record of publishing documents that are authentic and authenticated. For another, they are not only a media outlet, they are also activist. And this is part of satirizing the *New York Times* and its government subservience.

But some [news outlets](#) suspect the satire/forgery will hurt WikiLeaks' credibility. WikiLeaks has a history of posting secret U.S. government information that angers government officials, making itself powerful enemies. In 2009, the organization [revealed U.S. war crimes in Iraq](#) where American helicopter gunships deliberately targeted a helpless, wounded, and unarmed Iraqi who turned out to be a Reuters wire service photographer. WikiLeaks has posted numerous documents in the organization's short six-year existence that have proven the organization to be a dogged and reliable provider of once-secret government and corporate documents, not just from the U.S. government ([including](#) the Iraq war, Afghanistan war, and diplomatic cables), but also from companies such as Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, and corrupt foreign governments such as [Syria](#) and [Kenya](#). [In 2007](#) WikiLeaks' revelations likely toppled the Kenyan government in the next election.

WikiLeaks also [helped spark the Arab Spring](#) revolt throughout the Middle East by publishing data on [Tunisian dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali](#) in one of the most-wired nations in the Arab world. Despite the government attempts to censor protests and the corruption information, Ben Ali fled the country and sought asylum in Saudi Arabia in January 2011 — months after WikiLeaks' release of secret U.S. embassy cables confirmed the depth of Ben Ali's corruption. WikiLeaks releases include [millions of e-mails from Syria](#), some of which [speculate about a government chemical weapons program helped by Iran](#), in [documents as late as 2008](#). The speculation was [uncritically reported](#) by the *Washington Post*, despite the fact that the diplomatic cables appear to be speculative in nature.

WikiLeaks has even prompted multiple [copycat organizations](#).

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has also targeted corporate corruption, at one time [claiming to have Bank of America e-mails](#), though the [e-mails never appeared on the WikiLeaks website](#). Some [e-mails later emerged on another website](#) that is a friend of WikiLeaks. Among the more interesting WikiLeaks corporate document “dumps” were the [millions of documents from Stratfor](#), a Texas-based private “intelligence” corporation with an informant network across the globe. One e-mail in the Stratfor cluster spoke of a [plan to create, in conjunction with Goldman Sachs employees, a program called “StratCap”](#) to make money in the markets using their government and financial informant network.

Despite its many positive accomplishments, it's WikiLeaks' access to and release of some sensitive U.S. documents (such as the [U.S. Special Forces counterinsurgency manual](#)) that continue to garner the attention of federal authorities in the United States. Former U.S. Army intelligence officer [Bradley Manning](#) — charged with releasing much of the secret U.S. data to WikiLeaks — remains locked up and is awaiting trial on charges that could garner the death penalty.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange faces legal trouble himself. [Currently residing in the Ecuadorian embassy in London](#), Assange is seeking [asylum](#) from extradition attempts to take him to Sweden and —



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possibly — to the United States. He is currently fighting extradition back to Sweden to avoid trial in a bizarre “rape” charge in that country, where a person can be [charged with rape for having consensual sex without a condom](#). Assange claims that the charges are put-up, meant to make him accessible for extradition to the United States, where federal prosecutors reputedly want to [charge him with violating the Espionage Act of 1917](#).

Indeed, Attorney General Eric Holder is on record as [stating](#) of the WikiLeaks founder that “To the extent that we can find anybody who was involved in the breaking of American law, who put at risk the assets and the people I have described, they will be held responsible; they will be held accountable.” Holder described his investigation at the time (November 2010) as “an active, ongoing criminal investigation.” Even liberal Democrats such as California’s Senator Dianne Feinstein have [called for the prosecution of Assange under the Espionage Act](#).

Assange has an [irregular program on the Russia Today television network](#), which in the United States is a mostly Internet-based television network. RT America, [owned by the Russian government’s TV-Novosti](#), often [features free market and constitutionally-based scholars](#), though the network has a Russian bias (as evident in the company’s [Russiapedia profile of Russian President Vladimir Putin](#)).

Assange has been fighting extradition to Sweden for more than a year, and blames the U.S. government for trying to punish him for revealing embarrassing state secrets.

Photo of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange



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