



The 9 Weirdest Things About the WikiLeaks Story

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The release of the US embassy cables has thus far been one of the most... interesting moments in recent US (and World) history, impacting global politics in a way that is unprecedented. Nestled amid the outrage and debate are some truly weird aspects that make the brouhaha seem like a lost installment in the Jason Bourne chronicles (or *Catch Me If You Can*). More important than the drama and gossip, WikiLeaks is a tentpost in the information age, a milestone potentially heralding a new era of internet transparency. As world governments balk at the exposure of their secrets -- and scramble to suppress the information -- Assange and his crew are expressing their right to free speech and facilitating the public's fundamental right to know exactly what their leaders are up to, particularly when it entails wars, torture, and secret military action. Here are the 8 craziest facets of the international uproar surrounding WikiLeaks and Julian Assange.

1. Hackers on the Offensive

A group of hackers have pledged to wage war against companies that have "censored" WikiLeaks. Yesterday morning Operation Payback targeted PayPal in a DDoS attack (the company no longer lets people donate to WikiLeaks through its service). Later in the day they launched a successful attack on PostFinance, the bank that froze the assets of the Julian Assange Defense Fund. As of last night, the PostFinance site was still down.

2. Julian Assange Has Not Broken Any Laws ... Yet Our Government and Others Treat Him Like He Has

A Canadian advisor called for Assange's assassination, Joe Lieberman pressured Amazon to hypocritically tear down the cables, and officials and media repeat accusations that he is a terrorist *despite the fact* that the Wikileaks' actions have resulted in no physical harm to anyone -- unlike, say, certain governments. But amid all this, it is important to note that neither Julian Assange nor WikiLeaks have broken any laws, whether American or Australian, in releasing the leaked documents. And yet some lawmakers are so hysterical, such as GOP Senate Minority Leader Mitch O'Connell, they are suggesting the US invent *new laws*, solely for the purpose of bringing Assange to trial. Meanwhile, the government continues to intimidate companies who host the cables, with no actual legal ground whatsoever. As Glenn Greenwald points out:

People often have a hard time believing that the terms "authoritarian" and "tyranny" apply to their own government, but that's because those who meekly stay in line and remain unthreatening are never targeted by such forces. The face of authoritarianism and tyranny reveals itself with how it

responds to those who meaningfully dissent from and effectively challenge its authority: do they act within the law or solely through the use of unconstrained force?

The Swiss government has also frozen his legal defense fund, so even if someone does invent a way to nab him legally, his right to a fair trial is compromised.

3. Julian Assange Preps "Poison Pill" in Case He's Killed or Arrested

As established, Wikileaks leader Assange is not wrong in assuming at some point he may be arrested (Interpol's on the hunt) or killed (world leaders want his head). Or that WikiLeaks will be shut down. And so, like anyone who knows he's a walking target, he has put out a little bit of insurance on himself and WikiLeaks. Today he announced that, should anyone attempt to harm (or incarcerate) a hair on his head, he'll pull the trigger on a "poison pill" that would allegedly expose even more explosive information, including some documents about BP, Bank of America and Guantanamo Bay. According to the Daily Mail, an encrypted file sent out to various fellow hackers contains the information, and can be disseminated all across the internet if he decides to give them the key -- an uncrackable password consisting of 256 digits. Mark Stephens, Assange's lawyer in Britain, has said the information is tantamount to a "thermonuclear device," consisting of "doomsday files." Another lawyer, Jennifer Robinson, claims she's been receiving intimidating letters from Washington.

Ms Robinson references a letter from a state department legal adviser addressed to both herself and Mr Assange - appearing to suggest that Wikileaks and its lawyers were one and the same.

She said: 'By eliding client and lawyer, that was a very inappropriate attempt to implicate me. That is really inappropriate to come from the state department of all places; they understand very well the rules on attorney-client protocol.'

Meanwhile, the lawyers have claimed they're being watched by strange men in dark cars parked outside their homes. Reading newspapers. Probably about their client.

4. But You Can't Really Arrest Julian Assange

A great novelist once wrote, "Sometimes a man retreats so far inward he mistakes isolation for dominion." In this case, though, Assange's essential MIA-ness (he's supposedly in England) is pretty close to dominion. He is acting like a man without a country, and this is his armor against the world. As AOL notes, "The international nature of his organization makes questions of jurisdiction nearly impossible to answer." And because he is not a US citizen, he can't be tried for treason, a technicality apparently lost on some leaders and journalists. While the US could technically arrest him for spying, the best bet for those searching for his hide is if Sweden could extradite him for charges related to alleged rape. That is, if Sweden managed to get it together... their first attempt at extradition was foiled by bungled paperwork -- extradition papers filed with Great Britain did not state the maximum sentence for his charges, a small but important requirement for extradition. Meanwhile, Assange's native Australia has upped the ante,

promising him consular help if he's arrested by a foreign government, even while condemning the leaks -- meaning he might be able to, simply, return home Down Under.

5. Columbia Students Warned Against Linking to Wikileaks ... then Columbia Decides Linking to Wikileaks is OK

Last week, Columbia University's School of International and Political Affairs told its students not to link to or Tweet anything having to do with WikiLeaks, warning their curiosity could endanger their chances of ever being employed by the government. The school's employment office sent out an email to the students, many aspiring diplomats, saying an alumni from the State Department gave them a heads up about seeking Wiki info, noting that even posting comments about the leaks "would call into question your ability to deal with confidential information." The directive scared a lot of grad students for quite a few days. That is, until yesterday, when SIPA Dean John H. Coatsworth decided to err on the side of free speech, clarifying the Columbia email that was initially seen as a scare tactic. In a subsequent email to students, Coatsworth wrote:

"Freedom of information and expression is a core value of our institution. Thus, SIPA's position is that students have a right to discuss and debate any information in the public arena that they deem relevant to their studies or to their roles as global citizens, and to do so without fear of adverse consequences."

Furthermore, another SIPA Professor told Wired.com that students would be remiss if they didn't seek out the Wikileaks cables. "If anyone is a master's student in international relations and they haven't heard of WikiLeaks and gone looking for the documents that relate to their area of study," said Middle East expert Gary Sick, "then they don't deserve to be a graduate student in international relations." The First Amendment prevails. Also... touche.

6. "Sex by Surprise?"

The charges against Assange in Sweden have now been characterized as "sex by surprise" -- and no one seems to know exactly what that even means.

Assange's London attorney, Mark Stephens, told AOL News today that Swedish prosecutors told him that Assange is wanted not for allegations of rape, as previously reported, but for something called "sex by surprise," which he said involves a fine of 5,000 kronor or about \$715. "Whatever 'sex by surprise' is, it's only a offense in Sweden -- not in the U.K. or the U.S. or even Ibiza," Stephens said. "I feel as if I'm in a surreal Swedish movie being threatened by bizarre trolls. The prosecutor has not asked to see Julian, never asked to interview him, and he hasn't been charged with anything. He's been told he's wanted for questioning, but he doesn't know the nature of the allegations against him."

The charges have something to do with condoms, and their lack of use, or breakage, although it's largely unclear exactly what. The women accusing Assange have stood behind their accounts, but he believes the Swedish government's seemingly wishy-washy actions are part of a larger conspiracy to nab him for WikiLeaks. The New York Times:

According to accounts the women gave to the police and friends, they each had consensual sexual encounters with Mr. Assange that became nonconsensual. One woman said that Mr. Assange had ignored her appeals to stop after a condom broke. The other woman said that she and Mr. Assange had begun a sexual encounter using a condom, but that Mr. Assange did not comply with her appeals to stop when it was no longer in use. Mr. Assange has denied any wrongdoing and has questioned the veracity of those accounts.

Yesterday, new warrants were issued for Assange and he is presently making arrangements to meet with Scotland Yard. The premise for the warrants has not been revealed.

7. Future Cables Reference UFOs!

So maybe this is more like the *X-Files*. In a rare interview with the Guardian last week, in which Assange answered reader-submitted questions, he confirmed that not-yet-published documents reference unidentified flying objects. And lest you think he is jumping any sort of shark, it should be known that his information was vetted with journalistic rigor, just like every other piece of info he's published. The full [question and answer](#):

Mr Assange,
Have there ever been documents forwarded to you which deal with the topic of UFOs or extraterrestrials?

Assange: Many weirdos email us about UFOs or how they discovered that they were the anti-christ whilst talking with their ex-wife at a garden party over a pot-plant. However, as yet they have not satisfied two of our publishing rules.

- 1) that the documents not be self-authored;
- 2) that they be original.

However, it is worth noting that in yet-to-be-published parts of the cablegate archive there are indeed references to UFOs.

Of course, it's not exactly proof of the existence of aliens (or even alien-like bacteria here on earth), but it is a fascinating bit that not only intrigues, but illustrates the breadth of information Assange is sitting on.

8. Feds Go Nuts to Prevent Soldiers from Seeing Wikileaks

Soldiers in Iraq attempting to read the leaked cables -- or even read articles about them -- get a redirect notice on their government network saying they're on the verge of [breaking the law](#). The redirect has affected virtually every major news website, clearly, since not one has refrained from covering Wikileaks (despite their mass condemnation of the stuff). But as Gawker points out, "Many of those soldiers receiving the warnings have security clearances that would have granted them access to the State Department cables before they were leaked." One presumes the same goes for some of the government employees, who were issued a similar warning about reading the documents.

9. Iran Accuses US of Leaking Wikileaks

An ironic conspiracy theory when one considers the outrage Cablegate has sparked among everyone from Hillary Clinton to Mike Huckabee, although our Secretary of State exercised quite a bit more restraint than the gun-happy Huckabee. But considering what the leaks revealed -- that countries all across the Middle East have urged the US to strike against Iran -- it's an understandable conclusion. The leaks prompted an Israeli paper to express triumphant joy in feeling solidarity for its extreme stance on Iran -- an op-ed was titled The World Thinks Like Us—and Ahmadinejad stated his view on the matter explicitly, asserting the American government made the cables "organized to be released on a regular basis and they are pursuing political goals." Meanwhile, cables that stated Iranian dissidents had some involvement with the Israeli Mossad would not only strengthen current powers but undermine the dissident movement itself -- endangering the lives of Iranians critical of Ahmadinejad's policies. The Daily Beast:

"New and harmful" was how Freilich described the Wikileaks revelation that Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, consulted with Washington about working with Iran's students and ethnic minorities to topple Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's regime in Iran.

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