Watchdog or Bulldog

WikiLeaks from a normative perspective

Master Thesis

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Abstract

The debate surrounding WikiLeaks has been focused on a number of issues; the effects and ethics of total transparency, the impact of leaks on US diplomacy, the power of the internet and the wish to restrict that power by governments. When the attention for the content of the leaks diminished, debate centered mostly on WikiLeaks itself, its journalistic methods, its accountability, its controversial status as watchdog, governments’ reactions and what this all means for the limits to the freedom of the press and its place in society.

This thesis aims to present an extensive analysis of the criticism voiced towards WikiLeaks’ status as a public watchdog and as a media organization to assess whether it has the potential to be accepted as a genuine player in the media spectrum. In order to answer such questions a framework was drawn up from consensual normative principles on how media ought to function and what determines good journalism.

Analyzing WikiLeaks proved to be difficult for two reasons. Firstly, WikiLeaks’ infrastructure is unstable and unclear. A website that is online one day can be offline the next, never to return. This is due to the opposition that WikiLeaks has come to face, primarily from opposing governments. This opposition not only constitutes a challenge to WikiLeaks, but can be seen to represent a change in some governments’ attitudes towards the extent of the freedom of the press in a digital age. Secondly, the information about its organization and methods that is available through its official channels is also scarce, affecting the robustness of data. For the purpose of this thesis contact was sought with WikiLeaks, but there was no response to appeals for cooperation or assistance. This called for a highly interpretative method of analyzing qualitative data such as documents, publications, newspapers, blogs, documentaries and interviews with WikiLeaks employees.

The effort that is required to gain an understanding of WikiLeaks and the difficulty encountered when trying to come in contact is a reflection of the shortcomings in its organizational structure and of the discrepancy between its ideals and its actions. It cannot even live up to its own standards. In the end WikiLeaks proved to be a biased, intransparent and inconsistent organization. It is simply not developed enough to perform standard journalistic duties, let alone monitorial functions. In terms of transparency and accountability, it has evolved into the opposite of what it set out to be.

Keywords: WikiLeaks, journalism, media, press, watchdog
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1. Introduction

Soon after the Russian Revolution in 1917, the leader of the newly founded Soviet Union Vladimir Ilyich Lenin faced the troubles of controlling the hearts and minds of his people in a war devastated nation. In his attempt to control the flow of information he decided to ration the paper supply. Combined with a tight system of bureaucracy restricting the use of telephones, typewriters, photocopying machines and telex lines, Lenin was able to exercise full control over his people by controlling the flow of information.\(^1\) Such an anecdote from history shows that the power of information can be great and that even the most ruthless of politicians can be fearful of the effects of free speech and the freedom of the press.

In our current Western society, it is hard to imagine needing to ask a public office for permission to make a telephone call or use a computer. The idea that rationing the supply of paper would lessen the distribution and flow of information would be equally unimaginable. Over the past twenty years we have witnessed an explosion of media outlets and interconnectedness through the use of internet. What started as a useful addition to our information and media spectrum has now become interwoven into the fabric of our society and daily lives. We live in an era where computers and internet govern the essential processes in society and where the individual is exposed to a vast space of information and opportunities. These developments have gradually resulted in many new initiatives by individuals for sharing information and eventually into very successful initiatives such as Wikipedia, Google, Facebook, Twitter and also WikiLeaks.

Governments have each time needed to find new ways of dealing with new phenomena and new media. Applying a tactic such as Lenin applied in the 1920s would without a doubt be impossible nowadays. Western society has enshrined freedom of the press in its constitutions and politicians have embraced the many media that have confronted them since, starting with radio, then television, internet, and they are now struggling to cope with the internet 2.0.

The freedom of the press builds on the liberal perspective that the main enemy of the freedom of an individual is its own government. Early liberal thinkers in the eighteenth century such as John Stuart Mill, Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke saw in the political process a role for the media, as vigilant against the practices of the government which could

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potentially harm the freedom of the individual. This role and power of the press is based on its ability to give publicity to, comment and inform the public on acts of the government.\textsuperscript{2}

The embrace and protection of media by political parties and states has led to the practice that the media are also being used for negative ends, for instance during campaign, by obscuring arguments and real issues. This combined with a commercialization of the media, facing fierce competition have led many to believe that the media are in a state of crisis, neglecting their purpose, allowing a corruption of democracy, and ignoring important information.\textsuperscript{3} It is precisely this crisis of the role of traditional media that led internet activist Julian Assange in 2006 to create the organization of WikiLeaks, attempting to reinvigorate the role of press, promote transparency and achieving political change.

WikiLeaks criticizes traditional media for having neglected their watchdog role to protect the rights of individuals. In its opinion media have become guided by economic priorities and have as a result hereof abandoned their journalistic duty to be vigilant towards governments and other institutions for the public by providing it with accurate information.\textsuperscript{4} WikiLeaks believes that the media should empower the public, to ensure their governments remain honest, change bad policies and no longer withhold information.\textsuperscript{5} WikiLeaks sees itself as part of the media and as its task to pursue this greater transparency.

Believing the watchdog role of the media had been neglected the past few years, WikiLeaks set out to change this and developed a method of reporting of its own. Using this method it has brought diverse and controversial information since its website went online, reaching from politicians’ mailboxes and fraternities’ handbooks to high stakes bank fraud, military and diplomatic secrets. The work of WikiLeaks has within a short period of time led to an enormous amount of debates because of what it published, but also because of the way in which it did. It has resulted into significant opposition and among others divided governments, scholars and journalists over the question: ‘is this journalism?’

This question is important because the answer to it determines whether or not WikiLeaks has the right to the same freedoms as any other media organization. This is becoming more and more relevant because the opposition against WikiLeaks has gone beyond just words as WikiLeaks unravels more and more secrets relevant to nations’ abilities to conduct international relations. Increasingly, governments and corporations are trying to stop its activities. WikiLeaks tells us that this means that the freedom of the press is in danger and

\textsuperscript{2} Denis McQuail, \textit{McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory} (London; SAGE Publications, 2010), 168.
\textsuperscript{3} J. Blumler and M. Gurevitch, \textit{The Crisis of Political Communication} (London; Routledge, 1995).
\textsuperscript{4} ‘Introduction to WikiLeaks’, section 1.3.; URL: \url{http://www.wikileaks.ch/about.html}, as viewed on 06-05-2011.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
that it can affect the status of media in democratic societies. Critics believe that this freedom does not apply to WikiLeaks, because its work is not to be considered journalism. They say Assange is a hacker and not a journalist. But there are those that speak of WikiLeaks as a new avenue in journalism, the first truly transnational media organization, and part of the new media spectrum. The same question is also important because WikiLeaks has become an example for a number of similar initiatives, such as openleaks.org and brusselleaks.com.

Since the dawn of the written press there have been many normative traditions and theories on the role, functioning and requirements of the media and what makes good journalism. A commonly used metaphor is that of a dog. As Christians et al. (2009) illustrated it, either: ‘a watchdog controlling the power holders, a lapdog serving the master, and a guard dog looking after vested interest.’ WikiLeaks aspires to be the first in this analogy.

This thesis intends to make a qualitative analysis of the criticism towards WikiLeaks from media, governments and scholars on the organization, its methods and publications. It will compare WikiLeaks to a framework drawn from common principles of normative theoretical thinking on what makes media organizations responsible enterprises and what makes good journalism. This analysis will make it possible to determine whether WikiLeaks has the potential to fulfill a watchdog role as it aspires. The research question which will be used is:

“To what extent do the organization and the functioning of WikiLeaks have the potential to fulfill a watchdog role from the perspective of the normative principles of the functioning of the press?”

The first chapter will present a background on normative theoretical thinking on the freedom of the press and its role in democratic societies. The next chapter will present the abovementioned framework of criteria of consensual normative principles. This will be used to study the organization and the functioning of WikiLeaks. The chapter on methodology and data will set up sub-questions, operationalize the elements of the criteria from the framework and give an outline of the qualitative data. The analysis will consist of a qualitative interpretative assessment hereof, followed by a discussion of results and a conclusion to the research question.

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2. Theoretical background: Normative theories of the press

The press has not always had the right to openly criticize and monitor the activities of governments. In the 17th and 18th century the general view on what the press should be and do was authoritarian in nature. The press was owned by the government and its purpose was to support and advance its policies. Censorship of the media was common practice and criticism towards government activities and officials was strictly forbidden.\(^7\)

The views of the Enlightenment gradually changed this, adding a new normative tradition. Inspired by the philosophical writings on rationalism and the natural rights of man of men such as Milton and Locke, the Libertarian theory of the press was eventually firmly established in the 19th century.\(^8\) A notion of the media as a watchdog was introduced. Drawing from the liberalist principles such as rationalism, freedom of religion and speech developed the idea that these freedoms also applied to the press. Freedom of the press eventually found its way into constitutional legislation in the early 19th century.\(^9\)

According to Libertarian theory the media should be an instrument for checking the government, informing the public and discovering the truth. The path hereto was looked upon in the same way as in economic theory. Liberals foresaw a marketplace of news in which the truth would arise from a ‘multiplicity of voices’. There was a strong belief in the rational capacity of man to extract the truth out of a marketplace, which because it was free, was filled with true but also false information. False information was not seen as negative, but necessary for this ‘self-righting process’ of finding the truth. It may contain a grain of truth necessary to discover the entire truth. The public should therefore be subjected to an endless stream of information and the government was not to restrict this.\(^10\) Furthermore, media ownership had to be in private hands and the media should serve the economic system by bringing together buyers and sellers of goods through advertising.\(^11\)

Freedom of the press was seen as almost limitless. Erskine and Jefferson for instance contended that even if information directed against the government was false, the publishers thereof could not be held accountable for damages to the state’s reputation. The only limitation was when publications would infringe upon the rights of individuals.\(^12\)

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\(^7\) F. Siebert, T. Peterson and W. Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana; University of Illinois; 1956), 7.  
\(^8\) Christians et al., *Normative Theories of the Media*, 23.  
\(^9\) Siebert et al., *Four Theories*, 51.  
\(^10\) Ibid., 46-7.  
\(^11\) Ibid., 51.  
\(^12\) Ibid., 50.
The embrace of libertarian ideals led the media to develop an early idea of objective reporting. Instead of being a publisher of partisan opinions, the press came to think of itself as a news medium. Journalists thought they should alter their status as participants to one of an aloof spectator, presenting only raw facts. They became convinced that news should be a raw account of news and that the public should be trusted to form opinions of their own.\(^\text{13}\) Promising as these liberal principles sounded, the effects on the press of technological and social developments gave root to a great deal of criticism in the early 20\(^{th}\) century towards the press which eventually came to be known as ‘social responsibility’.

Firstly, technological developments of the Industrial Revolution, combined with a higher degree of urbanization, had greatly expanded the circulation of newspapers. A consequence was that only a small number of the media were able to serve such a vast audience and that there was little competition. As a result the majority of the media had come into the hands of just a few. In the US for instance, at the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century the bulk of the magazines were produced by five giant publishers.\(^\text{14}\) Moreover, industrialization brought about a growing volume of advertising, which became of vital importance to the press. The press began to identify with the communities and with the advertisers they served and began producing publications of which they believed to serve the public interest.\(^\text{15}\) The result is that many media in the US had become biased towards these interests.

Secondly, faith in the optimistic ideals of the Enlightenment diminished, among which the belief in the rationality of man to distinguish true from false information. Practice had not lived up to the expectations. As Nerone (1995) puts it: “newspapers never really developed into the public-spirited vehicles envisioned by men like Thomas Jefferson. They were often mean-spirited and consumed by political bias.”\(^\text{16}\) Whereas in Libertarian theory, freedom of the press meant the freedom to be true or false, biased or not, trusting in an invisible hand that would eventually correct this, ‘social responsibility’ contended that such an interpretation of freedom is not dedicated to telling the truth.\(^\text{17}\)

Social Responsibility theory eventually became firmly established after the 1940s and was primarily based on the idea that with the freedom of the press came certain social responsibilities towards society. Only with this understanding could the press fulfill its purpose of education and controlling the government. The press remained a free enterprise but

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 61.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 78.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 76.
\(^{16}\) J.C. Nerone, Last Rites: revisiting four theories of the press (Illinois; University of Illinois, 1995), 187.
\(^{17}\) Siebert et al., Four Theories, 76.
had to fulfill a certain level of adequate service to justify its freedom.\textsuperscript{18} This was combined with heavy criticism on the press’ sensationalism and on its bias as a result of monopolistic tendencies.\textsuperscript{19} In essence, Social Responsibility theory agreed with Libertarian theory about the functions of the press, but added some requirements in order to enhance its performance.

Social responsibility accepts the role of the media in servicing the political system by providing it with information, discussion and debate on public affairs; the role of informing the public to make it capable of self-government; and the duty of safeguarding the rights of individuals by serving as a watchdog against the government. It does not accept however that these criteria should be subservient to the libertarian idea that the press has a role in servicing the economic system, bringing together the sellers and buyers of goods, or in providing for entertainment.\textsuperscript{20} The press should be truthful, accurate and relevant. It should not just present only raw facts, but place them in a context which gives meaning. The press is expected to be objective and provide a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism. It should be independent and unbiased. In order to achieve this, media ownership should not be an unlimited private franchise and governments should see to protect this and the freedom of the press when in danger. In order for the media to effectively protect the public interest, they should be both free and adequate.\textsuperscript{21} Social responsibility was embraced in practice in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and changed the media, making them more concerned with the public.\textsuperscript{22} The media was now expected to serve the development of democracy.\textsuperscript{23}

More recently, another tradition of normative theory was introduced. According to the young Citizen Participation theory, the media also have a critical and emancipatory role. They should engage in the struggle for collective rights as voice of the public. This tradition adds to the requirements an emphasis on the media’s responsiveness to its public, focusing on feedback, interactivity and an intention to involve all citizens directly.\textsuperscript{24} In their study of normative theories Christian et al. (2009) have graphically illustrated the various theoretical fundamental differences of these traditions in the matrix below. The vertical axis indicates the composition of the society, where consensus refers to a unified state and homogenous culture, while pluralism on the other hand represents conditions of dispersal of power, cultural diversity and a greater freedom and diversity of expression. The horizontal dimension depicts

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{18} Christians et al., \textit{Normative Theories of the Media}, 24.
    \item \textsuperscript{19} McQuail, \textit{Mass Communication Theory}, 170.
    \item \textsuperscript{20} Siebert et al., \textit{Four Theories}, 74.
    \item \textsuperscript{21} McQuail, \textit{Mass Communication Theory}, 171.
    \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 172.
    \item \textsuperscript{23} Christians et al., \textit{Normative Theories of the Media}, 24.
    \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 25.
\end{itemize}
the attitudes and tendencies towards the role of journalism in democracy, the degree of
government control, degree of freedom of the press, duties towards society ranging from
autocratic to elaborate citizen participation.25

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1**: Four normative traditions (Christians et al., 2009).

From the time of the authoritarian control of the press by church and state, through the
envisioned *laissez faire* media system of the libertarian era and beyond the concept of social
responsibility, normative thinking by scholars has increasingly expanded the expectations and
responsibilities attributed to the work of the press. After the embracing of the concept of
social responsibility, the media and journalists have increasingly developed more elaborate
normative principles and codes of ethics of themselves as well, starting in the second half of
the 20th century.26 According to a study by Deuze (2005), at the end of the century this had led
to consolidation of an ideal value system and a consensus among scholars and journalists on
what the media should be and do. Based on studies by Golding and Elliot (1979), Merritt
(1995) and Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) Deuze comes to five traits and values that
journalism has developed to legitimize what it does: (1) Public service (providing public
service as watchdogs and active collectors and disseminators of information); (2) objectivity
(being impartial, neutral, objective and fair); (3) autonomy (being free, autonomous and
independent); (4) immediacy (acting with sense of immediacy, speed and actuality); (5)
ethics (acting with sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy).27

The following chapter will outline a theoretical framework, comprised of those
elements which normative theories in general have deemed crucial to the performance of
media and present means to operationalize them.

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27 Mark Deuze, ‘What is Journalism?: professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered’, *Journalism* Vol. 6, No. 4 (2005), 444 - 447.
3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

In order to assess to what extent WikiLeaks has the potential for becoming a public watchdog and adheres to ideals of good journalism, it is first necessary to define the watchdog concept for the purpose of this thesis. The function of press as a watchdog is an element in each tradition of normative thinking about the media, except for the authoritarian tradition. It is a concept that keeps on being expanded as thinking about the press, good journalism and democratic societies develop. The changes in requirements of what makes a medium a good, watchful and responsible one reflect the societal changes and normative thinking that are taking place at the moment. It should be stressed here that the metaphor of the watchdog represents an envisioned ideal functioning of media and its role in the democratic process drawn from several viewpoints.

To determine WikiLeaks’ potential status as a watchdog, I have identified the core criteria and characteristics that normative theories in general have attributed throughout the years to the functioning of a good medium. I shall outline the four variables of the framework in this chapter and operationalize them in the next.

3.2 Normative criteria

Firstly, the information function. Drawn from Social Responsibility theory, good journalism should aim to provide accuracy. The media must ensure that the information they spread is correct in its factual form. They must not limit themselves to presenting dry facts, but they should provide the facts with background information and meaningful context. They should organize methods to verify their sources and allow for their stories to be controllable.28 This will in part help to make the public capable of self-government.

The second criterion is considered to be the most important among scholars and journalists; objectivity. Media should be independent and refrain from any form of political bias or partiality when publishing stories. Objectivity concerns the behavior of the medium and not the content of the story itself.29 In this context it means balanced, disinterested and without a specific agenda.30 The media should present their information with a neutral attitude

30 Christians et al., *Normative Theories of the Media*, 147.
through a combination of balance in space and emphasis for opposing perspectives. It enables them to report on issues without bias and address the issues of all groups in society. In its report that gave birth to the concept of social responsibility, the Commission on Freedom of the Press gave some practical and ideological considerations for this argument and the responsibility implications for the press. According to the Commission, the media should serve as a forum for discussion and debate on public affairs for the public and political system. The argument is that in providing information the press is limited to its capabilities and it cannot publish everyone’s ideas. At the same time not every individual has the capabilities to voice his opinion with the reach that media have. So in turn, the media should be solicitous of various views and perspectives and balance various advocates of issues. They should allow comments, criticism and publish dissenting opinions.

The requirement of objectivity and impartiality finds its roots in the liberal democratic principle that the public - not political parties, media or any other entity - determines with its own rational decisions in which direction society has to move in. The feasibility of total objectivity of the press is a problematic topic debated in theories on press functioning. For the analysis in this thesis the spirit of the conclusion of the debate by Westerstahl will be used. Even if total objectivity is not feasible, it is imperative that media attempt to abide by objectivity guidelines, because it is the people that must ultimately decide and not media.

The third criterion is the monitoring function. In Libertarian theory a notion of protecting the rights of individuals was already present. This has however been expanded with the coming of social responsibility to a more elaborate monitoring in service of all society. The media are expected to monitor activities of those in power in governments and corporations, signal problems, be critical and hold authorities accountable in order to safeguard the rights of the public at large. Herein lies the essence of the current watchdog metaphor. Deuze (2005) calls this a shared value and in journalism of ‘doing it for the people’ by providing this public service. According to the Nieman Foundation for Journalism the goal of the concept is to see to it that the people in power provide the information the public

31 McQuail, Mass Communication Theory, 202.
33 The Commission, A Free and Responsible Press, 25.
35 Westerstahl, Objective News Reporting, 407.
36 Deuze, What is Journalism, 447.
should have in order to make decisions.\textsuperscript{37} It requires an active role on the part of the media as a surrogate for the people, asking penetrating questions at every level of government. Media must not only receive and transmit information, but they are expected to seek and investigate, with a skeptic mindset, whether the information offered by governments is sufficient.\textsuperscript{38} In order to be able to ask such meaningful questions, the media must ensure that they have knowledge of the subject and know what answers they are looking for.\textsuperscript{39} The Poynter Institute adds to this another requirement.\textsuperscript{40} The media must pursue an active, independent and wide agenda of topics and illustrate to the public in which way government practices affect their daily lives and rights of their communities.\textsuperscript{41}

The final criterion is the organizational transparency of the media. With Social Responsibility theory came a new sense of the press’ accountability towards the public.\textsuperscript{42} The Hutchins Commission early on concluded that a public which is presented with information is influenced by the reliability of those who offer it. If the public is to rely on this information, those who offer it must be known.\textsuperscript{43} Transparency is an important factor ensuring accountability and adding credibility to the other variables and a media organization as a whole. Information can be manipulated and its power can be substantial. Look for instance at the misuse of information leading up to the war in Iraq in 2003. In order for the public to rely and act on the information and the intentions with which it is being spread, it must be able to know where the information came from, how it was dealt with and who is spreading it. Transparency in organizational structure and working methods can for a medium underline an absence of bias. Insight into financial and owner structure can illustrate its independence. With transparency media can demonstrate the objectivity of its work, strengthening the other criteria, its credibility and build trust. WikiLeaks itself gives much attention to the requirement of transparency of its reporting subjects and criticizes the contemporary media for not adhering to it themselves. In a recent study on transparency on contemporary global

\textsuperscript{37} The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University is a project founded in 1938 named after Lucius Nieman, founder and long-time publisher of The Milwaukee Journal. It sets out to promote and elevate the standards of journalism, publishes the quarterly magazine Nieman Reports and offers professional journalists a one year academic fellowship program.

\textsuperscript{38} Christians et al., \textit{Normative Theories of the Media}, 146.


\textsuperscript{40} The Poynter Institute is a journalistic school run by experts and scholars, based at the St. Petersburg University, and dedicated to teaching and inspiring journalists and media leaders. It promotes journalism that informs citizens and enlightens public discourse.


\textsuperscript{42} Siebert et al., \textit{Four Theories}, 82.

\textsuperscript{43} The Commission, \textit{Free and Responsible Press}, 25.
media outlets by the International Center for Media and the Public Agenda it was also 
described as only natural that where we demand accountability from the subjects of news 
coverage, we should demand equal accountability of those covering the news.

In short this results in a number of functions and characteristics to which to test WikiLeaks.

1. Information function
2. Objectivity
3. Monitoring function
4. Organizational transparency

3.3 Interconnection
These four criteria are interconnected variables, influencing one another and sometimes 
overlapping and at first glance sometimes even contradictory. The information functions deals 
with questions into the way in which an organization publishes information in its factual form. 
This represents a vital building block for an organization to be able to live up to the 
objectivity and monitoring standards. If the media are to be a neutral forum where the public 
can exchange comments, criticism and educate the public, the factual information upon which 
this is based has to be correct and trustworthy. Unlike the libertarian era were even false 
information was considered a worthy contribution, nowadays it is considered to be the press’ 
responsibility to deliver only correct information.

In order for the monitoring responsibility to be effectuated, objectivity and the 
information function are imperative. In order to promote discussion, create awareness among 
the public about government policies and societal issues, the offering of impartial information 
with context is essential. Here the responsibility of the educational task of the press finds its 
resonance. Only when the public can know and check for itself that the information is reliable 
can it make independent decisions. Responsible monitoring needs reliable information and an 
objective approach from the part of the media. The press itself has recognized this as well and 
has enshrined objectivity into the ethics and codes of its profession. To sum up, in order to be

44 The International Center for Media and the Public Agenda was established by the Philip Merrill College of 
Journalism at the University of Madrid in 2006. It focuses its studies on global media and public policy; it’s 
projects investigate media’s roles and responsibilities in public considerations of political issues.

45 Openness & Accountability: A Study of Transparency in Global Media Outlets, URL: 
http://www.icmpa.umd.edu/pages/studies/transparency/z_about_media_transparency.html, as viewed on 18-04- 
2011.

46 McQuail, Mass Communication Theory, 202.
able to live up to the normative standards of good journalism, the first three criteria are essential. Transparency can strengthen these functions and characteristics. It can increase the reliability that is necessary to instill trust towards the public.

There appears to be a contradiction in the balanced neutrality criterion of objectivity and the critical stance media should pursue as a watchdog in monitoring governments. The two are in fact complementary, but the implication deserves some additional attention. On the one hand the media are expected to be distanced and act in a neutral fashion as much as they can. This pertains to the selection and range of issues, the presentation, organizational structure and much more. If a media organization genuinely dedicates itself to the democratic principle that power ultimately resides with the people and that a free and honest press is the cornerstone of political liberty, it cannot practice methods that lead to bias, opinionated reporting, distortion, unethical means of acquiring information and other mechanisms that can mislead the public’s perception of news.47

On the other hand media are also expected to have a controlling and educating function. The educating function of a watchdog is part of its monitoring function. The media should act as a surrogate for the people controlling the protection of the public’s rights towards the government. To that end they must inform their audience. They should even present that type of information of which people are not necessarily aware of that they want or need to know. An aspect which will come forward in the analysis of agenda-setting. According to Christians (2009) for a proper monitorial functioning ‘news should be selected according to the informational needs of the audience’.48 To the same end the media must be alert to prevent misuse of power by the government, which is its controlling and critical aspect. When preparing a story the media should always be wary of the information holes that might exist. Instead of only focusing on the information being offered by governments, it requires a mindset that asks the questions not being answered or topics not being addressed.49

Their critical stance is crucial in the political sphere to ensure the independent accountability of the government.50 But it is certainly not meant as a blind attack on any government policies which might meet resistance amongst the public. This aspect should not affect their objectivity.

47 Julienne Schulz, Reviving the Fourth Estate (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1998) 79.
48 Christians et al., Normative Theories of the Media, 140.
50 Christians et al., Normative Theories of the Media, 144.
Objective reporting is essentially reporting without motive. The monitorial function of the media can adhere to this non-motive reporting, although the media should be aware that it is a fine line they walk and that ‘barking’ against the government can come with certain negative implications. The objective of total objectivity is to let the public decide what is important. The monitorial role contains an element that the media has to determine what is in the public’s interest. This is a delicate process in which all the criteria find their importance.

As said, objective monitoring requires objectivity. By fostering transparency media can generate trust not just in their organization but also their methods of distilling the public interest. By a show of independence, by offering insight into the influence of economic and marketing developments, by being responsive and engaging in discussion with its readers. With minimal conditions of transparency, interactivity and accountability it is possible.51

Among theorists it is generally thought that accountability of the press eventually helps discern this common public interest, because the press is essentially accountable to its sources and its audience. It is a self-regulating system in which an engaged and interested audience can judge the quality of the information it receives. As in any market, if a product loses its trust, the consumer will eventually turn away. This process should keep professional journalists motivated to serve their audience and live up to the standards of their role in the democratic process.52 We shall see in the analysis whether WikiLeaks is still operating in a similar fashion in a similar environment.

51 Ibid., 140.
52 Ibid., 149.
4. Methodology

From the operational definitions of the criteria as set up in the theoretical framework, I have drawn the elements to examine and set them into sub-questions defining the analysis. The functioning of WikiLeaks has been examined through a qualitative interpretative analysis, drawing upon comments, opinions and writings from scholars, experts and various actors which play a role in the media process, such as governments, media and relevant individuals. Each sub-question comes with a description of the elements which will be analyzed in the available data.

4.1 Information function

An analysis into the question to what extent WikiLeaks strives to publish accurate information, which methods it uses hereto and whether it places its information into a context with additional information.

- Does WikiLeaks employ mechanisms to verify its sources and the veracity of its information? Identifying the presence of procedures, guidelines and methods within the organization intended to ensure sources and information are reliable.
- Does WikiLeaks provide context to the information in its publications? Examining whether the organization offers background information or articles and context to the information in its publications.
- Does WikiLeaks present its information in a manner that can be checked by others? Identifying the availability of ways for third parties to check the facts and publications offered by WikiLeaks.

4.2 Objectivity

For an analysis into the objectivity of the organization, questions were asked into the neutrality of presentation, the selection of topics and the active pursuit of diversity of perspectives. From the operational definition of objectivity in the previous chapter flows, that it does not so much entail an analysis into the content of its publications. The focus lies on the balance in presentation. The principle to bear in mind is that at the end of the day, it is the
public that must be able to freely make up its mind and that media cannot engage in the conveying of ideologies or prejudice or one-sided views.  

- Is WikiLeaks an independent and autonomous entity? Examining whether the organization can make its own decisions free from extra-journalistic pressures, such as corporate or marketing decisions. Being an independent and autonomous media organization should reflect in a situation where there is editorial independence for its journalists, meaning that they can cover the stories they want to.  

- Does WikiLeaks actively solicit a balanced and diverse agenda of issues? Examining whether the range of publications contains a bias, agenda or preference in its selection of issues. 

- Does WikiLeaks present its information with a neutral attitude? Examining whether publications contain politically oriented statements, opinions, ideologies or elements of sensationalism. Sensationalism is a manipulative form of presentation. In order for the public to make up its own mind, it must receive sufficient information. To answer the question of sufficiency, the definition as used in interpreting citizen model by Porto (2007) will be used. The sufficiency of information is constituted not by an absolute amount but by diversity of information and views. This definition reasons exactly from the premise that citizens must be able to independently make up their own minds. In order to achieve this, media must not flood citizens with every piece of information, nor should it keep information from them. It should rather focus on presenting a diversity of information and views.  

- Does WikiLeaks offer a forum where comments and criticisms on its publications are published? Studying the organization’s mechanisms to deal and respond to comments and criticism and whether there is interaction with readers through forums, chats, letters, publications or blogs.

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53 Christians et al., *Normative Theories of the Media*, 147.  
54 Deuze, *What is Journalism*, 448.  
4.3 Monitoring function
An analysis into the question to what extent WikiLeaks monitors and signals problems in society, is critical and dedicated to protect the rights of the public according to the operational definition in the theoretical framework.

- Does WikiLeaks incorporate values of providing public service as a watchdog in its mission and strategy? Identifying a dedication and connection to the rights of the public.
- Does WikiLeaks actively investigate government and corporate practices and ask critical and skeptical questions in the public interest? Identifying a degree of activism by the organization meant to safeguard possible transgressions by governments or corporations.
- Does WikiLeaks illustrate the public the effects of government and corporate activities on their rights? Identifying whether the organization reminds the public of its rights, and their relevance to the public interest when exposing information about a certain topic, and whether it exposes and warns the public when specific rights are threatened.

4.4 Organizational transparency
To perform the analysis on the organizational transparency of WikiLeaks similar measurements used by the ICMPA in a recent study on the transparency of the top 25 global media outlets were used in order to assess the characteristics set out in the theoretical framework. In many of the measurements there appears to be overlap with earlier criteria. It is important to bear in mind as mentioned that all criteria are closely interconnected. With the transparency analysis it is not so much important which standards and guidelines WikiLeaks has in practice, but much more whether it offers openness and insight into them.

- Does WikiLeaks provide openness about its owners, organizational and financial structure? Investigation into the availability of details on the part of the organization on financial assets and organizational structure and employees.
- Does WikiLeaks provide openness about their internal guidelines and standards for publishing their information? Investigation into the availability of details about the organization’s internal procedures, and guidelines and standards for the operations and publications of its journalists.
- Does WikiLeaks provide openness into criticism and is it willing to acknowledge and correct mistakes? Examining whether there are publications of criticism towards the organization and its working methods, and whether mistakes are openly admitted, even if embarrassing and corrected.

4.5 Data
The data used for the analysis to study the methods of WikiLeaks was comprised of the organizations’ websites, parts of its publications, several books, newspaper articles, government reactions, journalist opinions and the account of those individuals and the media that have collaborated with WikiLeaks. The study entailed the entirety of WikiLeaks’ development from its first publication in 2007 up to and including 2011.

Studying WikiLeaks’ official website proved rather difficult. Since its controversy after the publication of US diplomatic messages, it has been denied hosting by several companies, resulting in the fact that its original website was taken offline. After this several mirrors have emerged on the internet. The information however is not complete from its beginning and unstable. A mirror of WikiLeaks that is online one day can very well be offline the next. This has also made it hard to study the way in which WikiLeaks published its information. The raw documents that were leaked can still be found, but the way in which it was published on its website and the accompanying articles cannot all be retraced. This factor will be taken into account in when discussing the results of the analysis. The information that WikiLeaks can provide online is also limited due to a number of reasons which will also be discussed extensively in the analysis of WikiLeaks’ transparency.

Scholarly literature on WikiLeaks is so far very limited. Very few have yet published on this subject. Particularly at the start of WikiLeaks’ rise to world headlines, discussion was mostly focused on the contents of its publications and not on the way in which the organization functions.

These factors called for a highly interpretative qualitative analysis of the material that was available. Much of the analysis was done by studying news articles by several newspapers such as El País (Spain), Der Spiegel (Germany), The Guardian (United Kingdom) and The New York Times (United States), Washington Post (United States), NRC Handelsblad (Netherlands), de Volkskrant (Netherlands). In addition I have made use of articles from Time Magazine, Forbes Magazine, Wired Magazine, Reuters, Foreign Policy and several journalistic think-tanks and institutions.
Video material was also used, mostly in the form of documentaries, but also in the form of direct interviews with WikiLeaks employees. Among others these videos come from the BBC (United Kingdom), CNN, PSB, FOX (United States), SBS (Australia), NOS (Netherlands) and Al Jazeera (Qatar). An overview of all of these types of sources with bibliographical data can be found in Appendix I.

Some of those that have encountered WikiLeaks as collaborators on the release of American war documents and diplomatic cables have published a few titles which were also used, as well as an account of former second-man at WikiLeaks, Daniel Domscheit-Berg.

Finally, there are a few scholars however which have spoken out on the merits of WikiLeaks to the media spectrum in the form of blogs, interviews and internet articles. An attempt was made to gather additional information in the form of interviews. Repeated requests to WikiLeaks via email however did not lead to any response, let alone cooperation.
5. Introducing WikiLeaks

5.1 Introduction

In order to analyze WikiLeaks, this chapter will outline its development, goals and method. According to the website, WikiLeaks is a project of the Sunshine Press, a non-profit media organization based on the defense of the freedom of speech and media. It consists of a network of young dedicated volunteers, including journalists, programmers, engineers and mathematicians. WikiLeaks acts under the belief that total transparency reduces corruption and strengthens democracies. It criticizes contemporary media for failing to fulfill their goal of investigating and scrutinizing governments. At the same time it is critical of governments and their alleged suppression of information and manipulation of the public opinion, made possible by this weak attitude of the media. WikiLeaks sees for itself a new watchdog role in the political process. To tackle this WikiLeaks has developed its own model of journalism, branded by Assange as ‘scientific journalism’, which will be discussed shortly.

The organization first made headlines in 2007 when it released a report exposing the corruption of the Kenyan presidency. It was said that WikiLeaks caused its first journalistic coup by publishing this report. Assange himself has also claimed that this news eventually shifted the elections. In 2008 WikiLeaks released internal documents of the Swiss bank Julius Baer, revealing its hiding of large sums of money from tax authorities. In response, the Swiss bank filed a lawsuit in California against WikiLeaks and managed to get the domain name wikileaks.org offline. This decision was withdrawn after protests that it was in violation of the US Constitution. The lawsuit increased WikiLeaks’ exposure substantially.

In 2009 WikiLeaks received a hero’s status in Iceland when it exposed the plundering of the Icelandic bank Kaupthing by its owners at the eve of the financial bankruptcy which had struck the country in 2008. Following this publication founder Julian Assange and second man Daniel Domscheit-Berg appeared in public for the first time.

WikiLeaks’ profile grew even more when Assange presented the ‘Collateral Murder’ video in April 2010. The video showed US soldiers in Baghdad engaging Iraqi civilians. The

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57 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 1.5.
58 Carsten Göring and Kathrin Nord, Julian Assange: der Mann der die Welt verändert (Lebowski; Amsterdam, 2011), 37.
59 Ibid., 93.
61 TED Interview with Julian Assange, July 2010.
event resulted in the deaths of 12 people, among which two Reuters journalists. \(^{64}\) Shortly afterwards, WikiLeaks published the Afghan and Iraq War logs. The Afghan logs were compiled of 92,000 field reports of the war in Afghanistan between 2004 and 2009. They showed that the army intelligence services made intentional use of misinformation and that coalition forces had killed thousands of civilians in unreported incidents. \(^{65}\) The Iraqi logs also revealed civilian casualties up to 67,000 and a policy of tolerating torture by the Iraqi police and military. \(^{66}\) Guardian reporters said it was as if Saddam had never left. \(^{67}\)

In November 2010 WikiLeaks launched its biggest and most controversial release, when it started the publication of 250,000 classified messages from US diplomatic outposts all around the world to the State Department from 2007 to 2010. It became known as Cablegate. So far 15,000 cables have been released and more are being released on a daily basis. The cables became the talk of the day, in the media, in the US and in the public debate. It also proved to be the biggest challenge to WikiLeaks yet.

Initial reactions spoke of a diplomatic nightmare for the US. \(^{68}\) But as time passed critics became convinced that the effects were limited, because the cables contained little shocking and new information. The first stories that reached us were candid characterizations by US diplomats of world leaders. But many did stir commotion however, mostly in countries outside the US. Saudi Arabia for instance saw its repeated requests to the United States to strike on Iran as front page news. \(^{69}\) In Germany, the cables led to the discharge of the Foreign Minister’s chief of staff Metzner, after he was exposed to disclosing sensitive information to the US embassy in Berlin. \(^{70}\) In Tunisia, the public saw a cable published in which the devastating force of President Ben Ali’s widespread system of corruption was outlined, acting as a catalyst for massive protests. \(^{71}\)

So the cables did not lead to a major political crisis for the US. It did not lead to a resignation of US State Secretary Clinton as Assange would have wanted for instance. \(^{72}\) The United States responded strongly nonetheless. They started a charm offensive with those

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\(^{67}\) Leigh and Harding, *WikiLeaks*, 131.

\(^{68}\) Tom-Jan Meus, ‘WikiLeaks-publicatie is diplomatieke nachtmerrie’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 November 2011.


\(^{70}\) Ian Traynor, ‘WikiLeaks cables claim first scalp as German minister’s aide is sacked’, *The Guardian*, 3 December 2010.


parties affected in the cables, organized a reshuffle of diplomats, took strong measures to improve security protocols and initiated action and criminal investigations against WikiLeaks.\textsuperscript{73}

WikiLeaks’ exposure had grown tremendously. One the one hand there were many that considered WikiLeaks a champion of free speech. On the other, it had to endure a great deal of opposition. In China WikiLeaks was immediately blocked from the internet and all other media.\textsuperscript{74} In Tunisia, the government also blocked the website and without exception all websites referencing to it.\textsuperscript{75} In France, the government vowed to take measures to remove the website and warned French companies not to aide WikiLeaks.\textsuperscript{76}

Many politicians in the US have also rallied against WikiLeaks. Senator Lieberman successfully pressured hosting company Amazon into stop hosting WikiLeaks.\textsuperscript{77} US federal agencies blocked all access to WikiLeaks, warning employees that viewing WikiLeaks material would lead to sanctions. Even though the documents were already widespread on the internet, they were still regarded as classified.\textsuperscript{78} The US Attorney General started an investigation into the possibility of prosecuting Assange.\textsuperscript{79} And the rhetoric against WikiLeaks was extremely hostile to say the least. Palin wrote that Assange should be hunted down just as hard as Al Qaida leaders. Republican Mike Huckabee suggested that for Assange execution would be too light a penalty.\textsuperscript{80} And Bill O’Reilly, a notorious anchorman at FOX News has demanded the death of the ‘traitor Assange’.\textsuperscript{81} And many others believe that WikiLeaks is a terrorist organization.\textsuperscript{82} But it were not just the politicians that turned against WikiLeaks. Services to WikiLeaks have been denied by companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, PayPal, Visa and MasterCard.\textsuperscript{83}

Eventually the opposition led to the removal of the official WikiLeaks website URL (\url{www.wikileaks.org}) from the servers of EveryDNS. Soon afterwards a number of mirror

\textsuperscript{73} Ewen MacAskill and Sam Jones, ‘US looks to prosecute Julian Assange’, \textit{The Guardian}, 6 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{79} MacAskill and Jones, US looks to prosecute Julian Assange, 6 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{80} Haroon Siddique and Matthew Weaver, ‘US embassy culprit should be executed, says Mike Huckabee’, \textit{The Guardian}, 1 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{81} Göring and Nord, \textit{Julian Assange}, 139.
websites appeared on the internet, among which the new official website hosted in Switzerland, providing for most of the information formerly posted on the original website and the publication of several new stories. Nevertheless, the opposition has considerably damaged its infrastructure for uploading and publishing new documents. How WikiLeaks comes to its publication and which goals it has developed will be discussed next.

5.2 Goals
If we read WikiLeaks’ official website, we find that its goals are to bring ‘important news and information to the public’, ‘strengthening the role of the press’ and ‘making sure readers know the truth so they can make up their own minds’. If we listen to WikiLeaks employees and especially its leader Assange however, an entirely different goal seems to have developed over time. These three initial elements seem to have been backgrounded. Early signs of this can be found in 2009 when Assange said that WikiLeaks’ goal was to have ‘maximum reform impact’. In 2010 he said that the goal of WikiLeaks is to achieve political reforms through the release of suppressed information and that it makes a promise to its sources to try and get the greatest possible impact from their material. It is this view that as time went by has become more explicit. The most radical signs of change can be found in an interview by Raffi Katchadourian for The New Yorker, when Assange emphasized that it is not his goal to provide people with an ‘even-handed record of events, but to expose injustice’.

The change seems to have developed from a feeling of discontent about the low amount of media coverage that the leaks generated. Many documents on the website went unnoticed and many received far less attention than the organization had expected. This new mindset had consequences for the methods of WikiLeaks. It led to a new strategy where WikiLeaks started developing a practice of actively advertising its publications. Domscheit-Berg describes that it was at the end of 2009 when WikiLeaks came to understand that it needed to learn which stories would make headlines and which would not.

5.3 Scientific Journalism
The term ‘scientific journalism’ is a term coined by Julian Assange to describe WikiLeaks’ publication method. If one studies the organization however it becomes clear that it is not
much more than just a phrase. The method of WikiLeaks is not fixed and has changed on a number of occasions. Originally, WikiLeaks was supposed to be a website making use of the content management system ‘MediaWiki’, hence the name WikiLeaks. Much like Wikipedia, the idea was that individuals could start and edit articles, pages, discussions and add documents to the website. Leakers could upload documents and subsequently everyone would be able to discuss and assess the credibility and plausibility of documents. But after the first leak failed to produce such a result, WikiLeaks changed its method and later again.89

Individual submissions are however still at the basis of WikiLeaks’ publications.

The first principle of WikiLeaks’ journalistic method is source anonymity. WikiLeaks provides a link to an electronic drop box and detailed instructions for individuals on how to safely prepare their documents. Anonymity is guaranteed through the dropbox. It shields documents from those monitoring traffic on the internet and from WikiLeaks itself.90 It keeps no record of location, time zone, internet browser or even the time and date of submission.91 To illustrate, WikiLeaks has no way of knowing whether Bradley Manning, arrested by the US government for leaking documents to WikiLeaks, was the source of the documents. It can not disclose this information, simply because it does not have it to begin with.92

The material that WikiLeaks accepts is subject to a number of criteria, which will come forward in the analysis later on. The key points are that it has to concern official documents that are in the public interest, containing information that is not already publicly available.93 Documents are published in the order of submission. By doing this, WikiLeaks wants to keep itself independent and unbiased.94 When documents meet the criteria for publication, the next step is the execution of so-called veracity checks on the documents.95 When it is determined that a document is genuine and suitable for publication, WikiLeaks’ journalists write an introductory news article based on the document and publish it on the website along with the raw source material. This allows for the public and other media organizations to look into the information and use it for their own purposes, hereby supporting the work of other journalistic organizations. WikiLeaks hopes to create cooperation and strengthening the press as a whole.96

89 Göring and Nord, Julian Assange, 46.
91 Ibid., section 3.1.
93 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 2.0.
94 Ibid., section 1.2.
95 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
96 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 1.3-1.4.
WikiLeaks does not censor information contained in the documents, except when it is necessary in order to protect the lives of innocent people. It calls this its harm minimization procedure, which is the final step before publishing documents. This procedure according to Assange also includes notifying affected parties.

The method changed again when WikiLeaks decided to team up with several large newspapers when it published the Afghan and Iraq War Logs, and the diplomatic cables. WikiLeaks reached out to these newspapers in order to increase coverage and to deal with the wealth of the material it had received. The partnership meant that all parties cooperated, discussing how to systematically analyze and redact the material. The newspapers’ journalists wrote the background stories, while WikiLeaks simultaneously released the raw material.

It is unmistakably clear that WikiLeaks sees itself as a journalistic organization. Assange repeatedly has defended himself against what he calls the deliberate attempt to redefine what WikiLeaks does not as publishing or journalistic activities but as hacking. WikiLeaks is met with great opposition from governments and the media. Governments are suddenly confronted with an uncontrollable cross border flow of their classified information. It means that they do not know and have no control over who is reading this information and it limits their abilities to engage in strategic policymaking when everything they do is potentially totally transparent. The media are on the other hand confronted with a critical competitor and a deterioration of their monopoly position as gatekeepers of the news. WikiLeaks challenges contemporary media by offering a completely anonymous, independent and international platform for publication. These roots and effects of opposition to WikiLeaks’ potential as a watchdog will come forward in the analysis in the next chapter.

We can see that WikiLeaks explicitly embraces many of the normative principles in their goals and methods that have come to be expected of the media. The analysis in the following chapter will provide us with an insight on how WikiLeaks fits in to consensual normative principles of good journalism as defined in the theoretical framework.

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97 Ibid.
6. Qualitative analysis: WikiLeaks

6.1 Information function

As a guide for the analysis of each of the criteria of the normative framework, a number of sub-questions were drafted, which will serve as paragraphs. The first criterion to be examined for WikiLeaks was the information function.

Does WikiLeaks employ mechanisms to verify its sources and the veracity of its information?

According to WikiLeaks, it has installed procedures within its organization intended to ensure sources and information are reliable, so-called veracity checks. Assange has claimed that WikiLeaks has authenticated everything that it has published.\(^{102}\) This gives the impression that WikiLeaks adheres to this normative principle. There are also some known examples of how WikiLeaks verifies the authenticity of documents. Domscheit-Berg writes that one method of establishing the authenticity of documents came from requests for removal of documents. Whenever such a request was made, WikiLeaks asks the person whether he could prove having copyright over the documents. Many provided WikiLeaks with screenshots proving their ownership. The same examples are given by Assange.\(^{103}\) Closer examination however, sheds much doubt over the robustness and even the existence of these checks.

In 2009 WikiLeaks claimed to have published over 1.2 million documents. Simple arithmetic and using common sense by Wired Magazine shows that this means that a great number of WikiLeaks employees had to have verified the authenticity of over 1,000 documents a day for three years straight. This seems virtually impossible.\(^{104}\)

In an interview with Australian television Assange admits that before publishing the 92,000 Afghan War Logs, WikiLeaks employees had only read roughly about two percent which is 2,000 documents. Working with 20 people over a month’s time, checks could not have been performed.\(^{105}\) This paints an image of Assange as being inconsistent. His organization did not read all documents, yet in another interview he attacked the statements made in the press by analysts, claiming that the documents did not contain any new

\(^{104}\) Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
information, by saying: “This is typical nonsense by analysts who didn’t bother to read the reports. How do they know there is nothing new in there? Did they read 92,000 reports?”

The most revealing information however comes from Domscheit-Berg. He confirms a view that it is not only impossible to perform these checks for all documents, but that the checks that were performed were extremely weak. He calls it ‘a deceit’ that did not amount to much more than verifying whether the documents were manipulated technologically and a few Google searches. There was never any forensic analysis or examination of ‘other criteria’. As for the manpower, he confirms that WikiLeaks does have a number of volunteers in place, but in the times of his employment there were no mechanisms to put them to work. Access to the documents was only granted to him and Assange and so they were the only ones who could have even performed these checks.

There are two other important examples which prove that WikiLeaks’ veracity checks are not performed strictly. Even though WikiLeaks writes in its mission statement that it is dedicated to ‘the revealing of the exact truth’, according to Wired Magazine research there is definitely fake content on WikiLeaks. An anonymous whistleblower known to the magazine, fabricated documents and submitted these to WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks identified these documents as potentially fake, but published them nonetheless. Domscheit-Berg defended this publication by saying that: “A fake document is a story in itself. WikiLeaks published documents for the coverage that it will generate and the political reform that it hopes will follow”. We find a similar mindset in Assange. He admits to having published another document, concerning a dispute between two companies, not knowing whether it was genuine or not and even highly doubting its veracity. Assange justifies this by saying: “Whether it’s a fake document or real one, something was going on. Either one company is trying to frame the other, which is interesting, or it’s true, which is also interesting”.

These two examples where WikiLeaks blatantly admits to having published material, without knowing whether it was actually genuine, is a reflection of the change the organization has undergone in goals. Whereas bringing ‘important information and news to public’ was its primary and official goal, the rhetoric and practice suggest that it keeps moving more and more in the direction of publishing not necessarily that which is true, but

108 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 3.2.
109 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
110 Greenberg, Julian Assange, 29 November 2010.
that which has the potential to generate the largest reforms. The remarks by Domscheit-Berg and Assange represent an old libertarian and outdated element that even false information can be permitted to be published because it can contain a grain of truth. It lacks the widely accepted refinement of a concept of responsibility of the press towards society to tell the truth. This example also indicates that WikiLeaks has been and is ready to make compromises to its own principles. Even though most of the documents appear to be genuine and may well be so, there are clear examples which show us that there are convictions within the organization that are willing to let go of this principle in favor of other objectives. The fact that most material seems to be genuine, may well be mere coincidence. It is not in any case to be accredited to a solid and systematic internal system of checks, guidelines or any other kind of procedure as is being led to believe.

**Does WikiLeaks provide context to the information in its publications?**

This question involves an analysis into the quality of publications, identifying whether there is attention for background information to the facts. One of the most encountered pieces of criticism towards WikiLeaks from governments and journalists is that it publishes information with too little or no context at all. German Professor of Political Science Herfried Münkler for instance, says WikiLeaks overwhelms the public with data without adhering to its responsibility to provide for an interpretative competence.  

Dutch journalist Henk Blanken, who calls WikiLeaks a degradation of the journalist profession, agrees. He believes that WikiLeaks fails to illustrate the conditions in which documents came to be. There is some merit to these critics about WikiLeaks just dumping data on the internet.

Initially, this was exactly the setup of the organization; to publish information and let the public puzzle it out by itself. The first publications by WikiLeaks were without any form of context. There was no introduction, no background information, just raw documents. WikiLeaks soon acknowledged - be it out of more commercial motives - that there was a need for context in these publications. It got frustrated with the fact that the public did not read its documents as much as it had expected. In response, it started to interpret for the public what the information means. Whether it provides an objective and diverse view responsibly will be dealt with in the following chapter, but the organization has clearly developed, and nowadays makes an effort that goes beyond the publication of mere facts.

Assange says this came from the realization that the public needed to know what the raw data was about beforehand. He understood that he could achieve a greater impact with his publications by adding summaries placing the documents into context. A long with these summaries press conferences were given and press releases were issued. The first time this happened was when the Collateral Murder video was released. According to Assange, the organization truly realized the power of context when it was in the process of editing the video. Only after the research was done, did they learn what had happened exactly. How many people died, whether they were armed, their identities and so on. And when they did, the video had the big impact they were looking for.

US Defense Secretary Gates criticized WikiLeaks for the release of the video saying it lacked any context at all. He said that the video is not representative of the war and it only allows for interpretation into the facts and events as we can see inside the video. It shows ‘no before’, and ‘no after’. He compared it as looking to the war in Iraq through a soda straw. It is true that the video was published as an incident and it cannot be seen as representative of the entire war. But WikiLeaks did publish the video with a great deal of additional information. It knew the place and time, the army unit, the identity of all those involved and it sought out the survivors of the event to acquire this information.

A similar government reaction to WikiLeaks came from the Netherlands concerning the leak of the diplomatic cables. Foreign Minister Rosenthal tells the national news agency that WikiLeaks operates irresponsibly by dumping the cables on the internet without giving the public a sense of the context in which these messages were created. The size of these publications, or ‘mega leaks’ as Assange has come to call them, shows that providing context is not only expected but also necessary for people to read them. For instance, how many laymen can understand complex financial reports? How many can and will read 92,000 military reports and understand its significance? These documents are filled with acronyms and military jargon. John Keenan - who calls WikiLeaks ‘data journalism’ - in this instance rightly pointed out: “the public is not interested in shifting through data”. The size makes it

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114 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
119 Greenberg, Julian Assange, 29 November 2010.
When determining how to publish the documents on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, WikiLeaks did just that. In an effort to maximize the impact of the material that had come into his possession, Assange reached out to editors from three newspapers and offered them exclusive access to the documents. The plan was to simultaneously release the documents on the WikiLeaks website, along with news coverage by the newspapers. The coalition of professional and experienced journalists had months’ time to systematically analyze the material and provide background stories to the documents. It later did the same for the US State Department records. The relationship between the original newspapers and WikiLeaks soured over differences of opinion, but that did not stop WikiLeaks’ new method. It kept adding new and more diverse newspapers to its media coalition, such as le Monde from France, El País from Spain and several others.

From a normative theoretical perspective we can question the motivation for the dedication to giving context from the part of WikiLeaks. It is mostly motivated on improving its ability to market its material to achieve political reform rather than on an understanding that as a media organization it has a responsibility to do so and that it is expected to give meaning to raw facts in service of the public, its interest and the democratic system.

Nevertheless, the method it chose to promote its material made its publications more contextual, understandable and digestible for the general public. Every step in its development resulted in more elaborate background information accompanying the raw material published on the WikiLeaks website. When it published the documents from the US State Department it did not mass dump cables with no information as critics say. Not all 250,000 messages were released at once and WikiLeaks ensured that thorough redaction was being conducted on those that were. Saying that the documents that WikiLeaks sends out into the world contain no context at all is no longer true. The quality of its context in terms of neutrality, diversity and sufficiency will be analyzed in a later chapter.

Does WikiLeaks present its information in a manner that can be checked by others?
With regards to the possibility for third parties to check the publications by WikiLeaks the answer is very straight forward. WikiLeaks has incorporated as a founding principle of its ‘scientific journalism’ that together with each story and publication, whether it is by their

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121 The Economist, Interview with Julian Assange, 28 July 2010.
hand or by hands of one of their partners, all original documents and sources can be found online. Anyone with an internet connection can access an archive of all the publications made so far and for himself verify if the information WikiLeaks claims to have found in the documents is actually there. The information is made widely available for analysis by using the website, but also in downloadable torrents and even in searchable databases and specialized websites as with the diplomatic cables and the war logs.

In this respect it outperforms other media organizations in their distribution of source material. The fact that WikiLeaks has such a vast infrastructure to spread its sources all over the world within minutes and so easily accessible to anyone with an internet connection is the greatest incentive for governments to oppose WikiLeaks. The publication of their classified information can not only be embarrassing for a government, but it also limits its possibilities towards other nations. As an organization it also forces it to contemplate new organizational mechanisms to limit its vulnerability to potential whistleblowers. The reaction that governments have shown to WikiLeaks does not suggest that governments are acknowledging these issues in this form. Instead of dealing with this latest evolution in exercise of freedom of the press, governments have primarily tried to regain control over this information. We also saw that indirectly politicians are trying to oppose WikiLeaks and preventing it from being online and publishing information. Nations such as China and even the US try to prohibit and prevent people from reading it on the internet, blocking off even those media organizations that refer to WikiLeaks. This external opposition to WikiLeaks is also damaging to its potential to become a watchdog. A development to which we will return later on in the analysis.

6.2 Objectivity
It is important to recall in this analysis that from the operational definition of the framework flows that at the end of the day, it is the public that must be able to freely make up its mind and that media cannot engage in the conveyance of ideologies, prejudice or one-sided views.

**Is WikiLeaks an independent and autonomous entity?**
The first question is to examine whether WikiLeaks can make its own decisions free from extra-journalistic pressures, such as corporate or marketing decisions. Being an independent and autonomous media organization should reflect in a situation where there is editorial

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122 WikiLeaks archives, URL: [http://wikileaks.ch/file/wikileaks_archive.7z](http://wikileaks.ch/file/wikileaks_archive.7z), as viewed on 20-05-2011.
independence for its journalists, meaning that they can cover the stories they want to. To know this, we must first determine what the organizational and financial structure of WikiLeaks looks like and how decisions are made. Here is where the official WikiLeaks website stops informing us and where a great deal of the criticism towards WikiLeaks stems from. There are several reasons why there is little to no direct information on how the organization of WikiLeaks works. These will be discussed in the chapter on transparency.

As for who is in charge, founder Assange has said that it is only his role within the organization to be ‘the lightning rod’ and to attract the attacks on WikiLeaks. When asked why WikiLeaks had waited so long with presenting a spokesman in public, Assange replied that WikiLeaks was forced to by the public, but that he had rather remained anonymous. “People started writing about us even though we weren’t speaking to the media and as result just started inventing things. The public demands that it has a face.” According to Assange, no one in the organization wanted to step up as spokesman afraid of possible consequences. He then volunteered and took up this task.

In the beginning there was indeed much speculation to who was behind WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks itself suggested that it was founded by Chinese dissidents. Later rumor started circling that it was a covert CIA project. Domscheit-Berg says that WikiLeaks stimulated this uncertainty in order to raise its profile. He himself never met any dissidents and was for a very long time unaware of how many people exactly worked at WikiLeaks. He and Assange were actively stimulating the illusion that WikiLeaks was an enormous organization. For instance, when in contact with the outside world, they would often communicate using pseudonyms and different email accounts with a range of fake organizational functions. As for the volunteers, their numbers were also greatly exaggerated. The number of thousands that was given to the press was based on the number of people that had signed up for the mailing list. Assange later admitted that WikiLeaks had about 50 volunteers.

Only a handful of WikiLeaks employees and affiliates are known to the general public. There is no mentioning of employees or directors on the website. There used to be mentioning of an advisory board, filled with prominent journalists, political and computer

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125 Göring and Nord, Julian Assange, 103.
126 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
activists intended to lend credibility. When contacted by Wired Magazine, most of these members stated to have had little contact with WikiLeaks. Nowadays, there is no more reference to any advisory board.

Financial data on WikiLeaks is also hard to find. Both Assange and Domscheit-Berg have released some details on WikiLeaks’ financial network however. By 2008 WikiLeaks was using three US PayPal and two UK Moneybookers accounts to which people could make donations. The Moneybookers account was closed in August 2010 by Moneybookers pending a government fraud investigation. In 2009 WikiLeaks set up donations through the Wau Holland Foundation, a German foundation dedicated to the freedom of information. Under German law it may not disclose the names of donors. According to Assange, the financial network of WikiLeaks also contains a number of organizations in France, Sweden, Australia and the United States that act a front for the organization. These organizations can receive money from the Wau Holland Foundation without revealing delicate information about for instance, who pays for WikiLeaks’ internet infrastructure or location. Finally, WikiLeaks also tried raising money by auctioning some of the material it had received, which has led to heavy criticism. There is a reason for this secrecy. According to Assange, due to the nature of the information published by WikiLeaks, lawsuits are a constant risk and can damage the organization’s operations. WikiLeaks therefore cannot risk damage to its cash flow. The result is that no one knows where the money comes from and how it is being spent. Not even WikiLeaks employees know this, because only Assange has authority over the funds.

So the organizational and the financial structure of WikiLeaks are kept secret. Assange claims this secrecy for the organization is needed, because of the dangerous nature of its information. He has shown a willingness to go to great lengths to ensure this secrecy by forcing his employees to sign a confidentiality agreement.

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129 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
130 Domscheit-Berg, Inside WikiLeaks, 83.
131 Ibid., 130.
133 Domscheit-Berg, Inside WikiLeaks, 84.
workings and organizational structure, processes, location of assets and any further professional or personal information of all WikiLeaks staff and volunteers.\textsuperscript{138} This reveals a deliberate policy to conceal any details about the organizational and financial structure.

But who then makes the decisions for WikiLeaks internally? The information that can be found indicates that WikiLeaks is an autonomous organization under the leadership of one. Although Assange may have claimed that he is a voluntary victim of the public’s wish to see a spokesperson, studying WikiLeaks makes it clear that he is the undisputed leader and that he determines what is done. Everyone who has ever encountered WikiLeaks tells an equal story. The profiles about WikiLeaks and its founder depict a picture of an autocratic reign by Assange. Some WikiLeaks employees have even said to have left the organization because of an increasing erratic, dictatorial and imperial leadership by Assange.\textsuperscript{139}

Katchadourian who joined Assange’s team in the Icelandic bunker when it was editing the Collateral Murder video is clear about the fact that Julian was the sole decision maker the entire time.\textsuperscript{140} Former WikiLeaks employee and member of the Icelandic Parliament, Birgitta Jónsdóttir also confirmed that WikiLeaks was all but a horizontal organization and rather a pyramid structured one with Assange at the top.\textsuperscript{141} As one Australian reporter said: “\textit{It is safe to say that where he is, WikiLeaks is}.”\textsuperscript{142} A characterization repeated by Domscheit-Berg who, right before he left the organization in September 2010, confessed to Der Spiegel that WikiLeaks has no clear decision making structure and that all is at the hand of Assange. The core team plays no role at all in the decision making process.\textsuperscript{143} Assange has become the autocratic head of WikiLeaks.\textsuperscript{144} He is quoted by a prominent former staff member, Herbert Snorasson, to have said: “\textit{I am the heart and soul of this organization, its founder, philosopher, spokesperson, original coder, organizer, financier and all the rest. If you have a problem with me, piss off}”.\textsuperscript{145} It appears that he agrees.

WikiLeaks appears independent externally, but this has not led to an editorial independence internally. Given the nature of WikiLeaks’ setup, it is never entirely up to WikiLeaks what it can publish. By nature of the material it publishes it is completely source

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\textsuperscript{138} Appendix II: WikiLeaks Confidentiality Agreement
\textsuperscript{139} Burns and Maiya, WikiLeaks Founder on the Run, 23 October 2010.
\textsuperscript{140} Katchadourian, No Secrets, 7 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{143} Marcel Rosenbach and Holger Stark, ‘Mir bleibt nur der Rückzug’, Der Spiegel, 26 September 2010.
\textsuperscript{144} Domscheit-Berg, Inside WikiLeaks, 219.
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dependent. It can ‘want’ to write about many things but if no one leaks information, that is the end of it. This is true. But it used to be that as a show of its independency, WikiLeaks published all that had been submitted. But the risen profile of WikiLeaks has led the submissions to increase exponentially. Combined with the small capacities it turned out to have, WikiLeaks found itself exhausted by the enormous increase in material. The times where WikiLeaks could publish all and that no choices had to be made are over. Whether these choices contain a political agenda will be further analyzed in the following chapter.

There are several indications however that suggest that an editorial selection has been based partially on marketing motives. When WikiLeaks learned that people were not reading their documents out of themselves, it began experimenting with different ways to increase and maximize its exposure. This was one of the reasons for instance why it sought contact with traditional press. Domscheit-Berg called it: “from the media we tried to learn how to manipulate the public opinion”. This began in 2009 when it collaborated with Stern Magazine on publishing secret billion dollar contracts between the German government and several companies. As in 2010, a more drastic measure hereto was undertaken. Almost all of the publications by WikiLeaks that year concerned the United States. There were several reasons for this to which we will return later on, but one important reason simply boiled down to ensuring the greatest amount of publicity by focusing on the greatest possible adversary.

Internally, WikiLeaks’ employees found themselves forced to work solely on material on the United States in order to raise WikiLeaks’ profile, maximize publicity and increase revenue from donations. They had little say in this course. Externally, the editorial independence and autonomy for WikiLeaks as an organization also suffered a blow when it decided to include regular newspapers when releasing the documents of the Afghan and Iraqi war and the cables. Assange has called the cooperation ‘delegation’, intended to cope with the tsunami of material that WikiLeaks is handling. And this is true to the extent that WikiLeaks could no longer add context, analyze and publish the material on its own. But delegation implies a certain level of control, which has been difficult for WikiLeaks to maintain.

WikiLeaks shared the war logs material early on in the process with its first media partners, effectively binding itself to them. This process did not go as WikiLeaks had intended. By committing itself to these newspapers, it lost control over which stories were to

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146 Geenberg, Julian Assange, 29 November 2010.
147 Domscheit-Berg, Inside WikiLeaks, 46-47.
148 Ibid., 188-189.
be published and how. WikiLeaks could be put out of play, which is exactly what happened when The New York Times decided to cease cooperation after publication of the Afghan war documents, but continued on its own with publishing the rest of the material. By having given the newspaper the material earlier, WikiLeaks’ hands were tied.

Each of these newspapers now has its own criteria on what to publish next. Many have obvious regional interests in which cables they choose to report on. The Guardian even developed a system where the readers can send in requests, which it takes under consideration, leaving WikiLeaks with no editorial control. It does not appear that this way of publishing will end anytime soon. The organization has decided to continue this form of cooperation expanding its media coalition to 63 partners at the moment.

WikiLeaks as an organization seems to be externally independent. It is not bound to any other organization or agency or at the mercy of financial benefactors with an agenda of their own. It receives money purely from anonymous donations. This has however not resulted into an editorial freedom for WikiLeaks internally. WikiLeaks’ journalists, if they even exist as such, cannot choose to write what they want. Not as long as one man determines its course, and not as long as WikiLeaks gives exclusive rights to its material to other media entities. WikiLeaks chooses its stories for them based upon their marketing value. WikiLeaks is hereby increasingly mimicking the behavior that it so vigorously criticizes in governments and corporations and restricting its editorial independence.

**Does WikiLeaks actively solicit a balanced and diverse agenda of issues?**

This question is to examine whether WikiLeaks’ coverage contains an agenda, bias or preference in its selection of issues. In the first year of WikiLeaks’ existence the official agenda entailed the start of an information war against the repressive dictatorial and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. This slowly seemed to change. It became clear that as far as Assange was concerned, many Western countries were also to be considered authoritarian. One of the core principles according to WikiLeaks is that it claims to be unbiased. To ensure this, it has incorporated in its method that submissions are dealt with without discrimination. Appointing a regional agenda up front seems in dissonance with committing itself to a principle of non-discrimination.

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154 Ibid., 34.
This principle was tested in 2009 when by mistake WikiLeaks sent an email to its benefactors without using the *blind carbon copy* line, revealing to all each other’s identities. The list of names was submitted to WikiLeaks as a leaked document. Wanting to show the public it would publish anything, even if it is was bad for the organization itself, WikiLeaks published the document. Domscheit-Berg confirms that WikiLeaks used to be discrimination free in what it published. Whether it was locally or internationally important, all submissions would be dealt with and processed equally. This changed when WikiLeaks started publishing the 2010 American documents. Critics said that the organization turned against the US as its only enemy. Even partner of WikiLeaks in publishing the war logs, Editor-in-Chief of The New York Times Bill Keller, writes that Assange is ‘suffused with a glib antipathy towards the United States’ and that he clearly has an agenda of his own.

If we look at the WikiLeaks archive, we can at least establish that a numerical preference in US related topics can be supported. Over one fourth of the leaks published between 2006-2010 concerns US government entities, corporations, individuals or groups. Zakaria explains that WikiLeaks has so many secrets of the US, because the US has so many to begin with. Time editor Massimo Calabresi gives a similar argument. He argues that WikiLeaks can have so many US secrets because of its system of classification. In 2009 the United States had 183,224 topics labeled classified, containing 54,651,765 documents. According to him, the US is classifying too much information that should not be classified. Officially there are only 1,336 people that can classify information as secret, but they can delegate this authority to over 2 million government officials. Ironically, a smaller amount of people within the system have clearance to look at this information. If it was Manning that provided the material to WikiLeaks, he was one of the 854,000 people who could have.

In WikiLeaks’ defense, Assange has on occasion strenuously repeated that WikiLeaks has no intention of waging a personal war against the United States. He wants to expose China, Russia and other oppressive regimes just as much. He has defended WikiLeaks by

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155 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
158 Overview WikiLeaks downloadable archives with the raw documentation from 2006-2010, URL: http://wikileaks.ch/file/wikileaks_archive.7z, as viewed on 20-04-2011.
159 Zakaria, It’s Not So Bad, 13 December 2010, 19.
161 Ibid., 24.
stressing that WikiLeaks by nature of the material it publishes is totally source dependent.\textsuperscript{163} Those that choose to leak determine the agenda of WikiLeaks. Nevertheless, with all that was being submitted to WikiLeaks choices had to be made. Domscheit-Berg reveals that there was a bias and even Assange has made statements supporting this. Domscheit-Berg explains that there were four reasons why the United States became the primary target of WikiLeaks.\textsuperscript{164} The first was Assange’s personal frustration with US foreign policy. Assange confirms this antipathy many times, for instance in an interview with The New York Times, when he said that the US had become an increasingly militarized society and a threat to democracy.\textsuperscript{165} Secondly, there was a language barrier. Among WikiLeaks staff there was no one that could speak relevant foreign languages. Thirdly, WikiLeaks could, by seeking out the greatest adversary it could find, ensure the greatest amount of publicity.\textsuperscript{166} Finally, Assange adds the motivation that WikiLeaks is under attack by the US and is forced to fight back.\textsuperscript{167}

The key point is the will to ensure the greatest amount of publicity. WikiLeaks is not interested in a diverse agenda. It is interested in making the biggest news splash it can make. Assange has said: “we have to prioritize our resources so that the biggest impact stuff gets released first” and that seems to have evolved in one-sided targeting of the United States.\textsuperscript{168}

The answer to the question of whether WikiLeaks actively solicits a diverse agenda can therefore safely be answered negatively. There is no evidence that WikiLeaks solicits any information at all and the choices it makes when publishing the information it does receive are not intended to create a broad and balanced agenda. On the contrary, it has become more and more one-sided. If WikiLeaks offers a one-sided agenda, what can be said about the neutrality and the quality of these publications? The next question will go into that.

**Does WikiLeaks present its information with a neutral attitude?**

If the public is to be able to make up its own mind, publications should not contain elements with an agenda towards a certain viewpoint. They should be free of politically oriented and partial statements, ideologies or elements of sensationalism. To the same end, the public must also receive sufficient information. Here we come to the question at the heart of WikiLeaks’ objectivity; whether the publications offer sufficient quality to the public. To answer the question of sufficiency the definition as used in *interpreting citizen* model by Porto (2007)

\textsuperscript{163} Greenberg, Julian Assange, 29 November 2010.
\textsuperscript{164} Domscheit-Berg, *Inside WikiLeaks*, 188.
\textsuperscript{165} Burns and Maiya, WikiLeaks Founder on the Run, 23 October 2010.
\textsuperscript{166} Domscheit-Berg, *Inside WikiLeaks*, 189.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Greenberg, Julian Assange, 29 November 2010.
will be used as indicated in the framework. The sufficiency of information here is not constituted by the absolute amount of information but by the diversity of views.

We saw that one of the goals of WikiLeaks is in fact ‘making sure readers know the truth so they can make up their own minds’. Senior Editor of The New Republic Magazine Scheiber is very positive about WikiLeaks in this respect. He says, that whereas other media would suppress certain details and highlight others, WikiLeaks promises its sources distribution without a filter.\footnote{Naom Scheiber, ‘Game Changer: Why WikiLeaks will be the death of big business and big government’, The New Republic, 27 December 2010.} The same goes for CNN’s Senior Correspondent Nic Robertson. His initial reaction after the Afghan files was also positive. He observed that WikiLeaks seemed to adhere to the principle of good journalism, merely presenting the facts so that citizens can make up their own minds and are free to determine how to apply political pressure on their governments when moments thereto arise. He called WikiLeaks a new avenue in journalism providing information at face value without judgment.\footnote{CNN, ‘Interview with Julian Assange’, Larry King Live, 26 July 2010.}

A look into early introductory articles proves that WikiLeaks did just that. In 2009 it uploaded a document revealing health risks to personnel at a military base in Iraq. The article is not sensationalist, but sober and factual. It adds background information and explains its significance and there are no political conclusions or opinions attached.\footnote{WikiLeaks archives, ‘US Air Force exposes troops, Iraqis to cancer agents: Balard Air Base Burn Pit Health Hazards’, URL: http://mirror.wikileaks.info/wiki/US_Air_Force_exposes_troops__Iraqis_to_cancer_agents__Balard_Air_Base_Burn_Pit_Health_Hazards__10_Dec_2006/, as viewed on 25-05-2011.} Another example is when WikiLeaks released an internet censorship list from the Australian government. The article gives us the buildup to the document and its political significance within Australian politics. Even though the list includes WikiLeaks, there are no defending or attacking statements made.\footnote{WikiLeaks archives, ‘Australia secretly censors WikiLeaks press release and Danish Internet censorship list’, URL: http://mirror.wikileaks.info/wiki/Australia_secretly_censors_Wikileaks_press_release_and_Danish_Internet_censorship_list__16_Mar_2009/, as viewed on 25-05-2011.} The same goes for the leak of Sarah Palin’s mailbox. The article is factual and does not offer an opinion on the content of her emails. WikiLeaks did no more than explain how it had received the document and what its content was. It remained distanced.\footnote{WikiLeaks archives, ‘Sarah Palin Yahoo inbox 2008’, URL: http://mirror.wikileaks.info/wiki/Sarah_Palin_Yahoo_inbox_2008/, as viewed on 25-05-2011.}

WikiLeaks’ first experiment of publishing otherwise was when it published intercepts of US text pagers during 9/11. The messages were comprised of official messages ranging from the Pentagon to the New York Police Department. WikiLeaks released over half a million messages over a period of 24 hours to mimic as the day went. In its introduction it
stated that it hoped that it would lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how this tragedy may have been prevented.\textsuperscript{174} The difference is that with this publication, WikiLeaks clearly intends to provoke a greater emotional impact by the arrangement of the messages, but the introduction by WikiLeaks is still distanced and impartial.

Up to this point we can say that WikiLeaks let the documents speak more or less for themselves. There is a factual summary to place the documents in context, but there are no politically motivated statements made. The background information however is small in its size. As we saw with the context analysis, the early publications by WikiLeaks are meager. Furthermore, it alerts parties it is about to publish on, but it shows no motivation to tell their side of the story. In its philosophy of absolute transparency, there is no need to. The public will eventually decide based upon all the information. So, we find no elements of partiality but also no multiple perspectives to a story.

There has been however a major turning point in the development of the publications, affecting the neutrality. It began with the Collateral Murder video. This time the material was edited, subtitled and even given a condemning title. The title is derived from the term ‘collateral damage’ from military jargon. It is used to explain unintended or incidental injury or damage to persons who are not considered to be military targets. Such damage is not considered to be unlawful as long as it proportional to the overall military objectives. By adding the word ‘murder’, WikiLeaks is telling us how we should watch and interpret the video. The montage made from the raw material is done in such a way that goes beyond explaining facts. It is intended to increase the shocking effect and it contains a judgment on how to interpret the incident. It is a reflection of the fact that WikiLeaks has sought to learn ways of how it can maximize the impact of its publications and influence public opinion.\textsuperscript{175}

How it was brought into the public sphere was also different than all previous publications. As usual it was accompanied by an article on the WikiLeaks website, but this time a press conference was scheduled for release and a separate website, \texttt{collateralmurder.com} went online. Furthermore, Assange appeared in several news programs and talk shows commenting on the video and condemning the soldiers’ behavior. He made no secret of his intention. In one interview he acknowledged that he was deliberately displaying the American soldiers as monsters. He wanted to battle the euphemism of collateral damage

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\item \textsuperscript{175} Domscheit-Berg, \textit{Inside WikiLeaks},
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as he called it. To make sure that each time an army report would make notice of ‘collateral damage’, people would immediately think ‘murder’ instead.\footnote{Katchadourian, No Secrets, 7 June 2010.}

According to journalists from Der Spiegel, WikiLeaks did what journalists should never do. It took sides and was no longer simply publishing secrets. It was actively fighting the war.\footnote{Göring and Nord, Julian Assange, 78.} Just before Assange left for the press conference to present the video, he is reported to have said: ‘I’m off to end a war’.\footnote{Domscheit-Berg, Inside WikiLeaks, 160.} This confirms an image that the intention of the publication is indeed not one of informing the public and letting it decide upon the basis of new information. His intention was to persuade people to exert pressure on their government and to end the war; an ideological persuasion from the part of WikiLeaks. It did not let the video images speak for themselves, but manipulated them to enforce its own view and it did not offer any arguments or views to the contrary. There are for instance numerous valid arguments that can be made from a military point of view to nuance the soldiers’ conduct.\footnote{Al Jazeera English, “Collateral Murder?” Al Jazeera, 19 April 2010, URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zok8yMxXEwk&feature=related, as viewed on 27-05-2011.}

A more judgmental interpretation of the material by WikiLeaks is a reoccurring phenomenon since then. The same happened with the release of the Afghan and Iraqi material. Unlike before, Assange gave numerous interviews to give an interpretation by WikiLeaks of the material. In the introductory video he made for The Guardian, he highlighted the content of the Afghan reports and he explicitly stated that the goal of the release was to incite the people to take steps to address the war with their government and that the United States was guilty of war crimes, being unable however to specify which.\footnote{The Guardian, ‘Julian Assange on the Afghanistan War logs: “They show the true nature of this war”’, 26 July 2010, URL: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2010/jul/25/julian-assange-wikileaks-interview-warlogs, as viewed on 23-05-2011.}

The cables were introduced by Assange as ‘embarrassing’, ‘evidence of spying’ and ‘corruption’.\footnote{Julian Assange, ‘Secret US Embassy Cables’, WikiLeaks, 28 November 2010, URL: http://www.wikileaks.ch/cablegate.html, as viewed on 28-04-2011.} To set the tone even before one cable was released. In an interview with Richard Stengel from Time Magazine Assange explains one motivation for this release, which is his criticism on the secrecy of the US government being used to cover up abuses.\footnote{Richard Stengel, ‘Interview: Of Unjust Behavior and Civil Obedience’, Time Magazine, 1 December 2010.} Recently, he has also said that WikiLeaks exists to put a check on secrecy, because it is inherently corrupting. Assange wanted to make the work of diplomats more difficult.\footnote{WikiLeaks, WikiSecrets: Full Interview Footage.} Of course this is only side to the workings of secrecy within for instance diplomacy. He
disregards the fact that without any secrecy at all diplomacy is hard to conduct. Whichever one view is true with these leaks or with the video - if there is even such a thing possible – the most important element to recognize with regards to objectivity is that there is no nuance in WikiLeaks’ approach to both and there is absolutely no balance in presenting views.

Informing the public with a neutral attitude seems to have been sidelined and offering perspectives opposing those of WikiLeaks has never been the case. When asked why he decided to found WikiLeaks Assange replied: “I enjoy helping vulnerable and I enjoy crushing bastards”.

A strong statement, showing that he has made up his mind about the information he sends out into the world. Not only does he enjoy exposing those he believes are guilty of wrongful deeds, he also seems to enjoy the anxiety he creates with his organization. After Cablegate, Assange began promoting the impending release of documents from a major US bank, saying that he thought it was great that he had ‘all these banks squirming’.

Assange has also been quoted to have said that he is not interested in providing “an even-handed record of events” and that “to be completely impartial is to be an idiot”. Again from this analysis there seems to be a discrepancy between the ‘official’ WikiLeaks goals and those that are being pursued and proclaimed publicly. Its actions look more and more like political activism and less like journalism in this respect. WikiLeaks does not offer a diversity of perspectives. It tells only one side of the story and therefore offers insufficient information and insufficient balance for people to base opinions upon. It does not seek out information from the parties it is about to release on and voices no dissenting opinions. What it wants is to achieve political reform and its tool is suppressed information and offering multiple perspectives has no part in this. Its organizational structure is partially causal to this development and we can see that the requirements of autonomy and editorial independence are not just theoretical norms but also necessary features for a media organization to be neutral in its reporting. In a structure with only one leader and no internal dialogue it is nearly impossible to remain neutral.

**Does WikiLeaks offer a forum where comments and criticisms on its publications are published?**

Examining the organization’s capacity to deal and respond to comments and criticism to its publications was done by determining whether there is interaction and dialogue with readers

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186 Katchadourian, No Secrets, 7 June 2010.
and others through chats, letters or blogs and such. Its ability to deal with criticism is a reflection of a neutral stance. To publish and engage in dialogue with dissenting opinions fosters an unbiased environment. In order to be balanced there have to be mechanisms to deal with criticism.

As one of its core principles, WikiLeaks does not publish material in the form of comments, opinions or other types of firsthand accounts. It is only interested in publishing official and ‘suppressed’ documents.\(^{187}\) So there is no possibility of airing or dealing with criticism through the website and we cannot find any official direct dialogue published between WikiLeaks and its readers or other parties. In order to say something about WikiLeaks’ attitude in dealing with criticism nonetheless, a few accounts of encounters with criticism towards WikiLeaks in the media and with employees internally will be discussed.

In the many accounts of the encounters with WikiLeaks and specifically with Assange, an image arises of someone who does not respond well to criticism. Katchadourian describes Assange as someone who is quick to lash out at perceived opponents.\(^ {188}\) We find evidence of this image in his quarrels with those that have been critical about WikiLeaks and about him. There is the example where he attacked Wired Magazine, after it had published an article about Bradley Manning and WikiLeaks’ intent to release documents on the Iraqi War. Although, this turned out be true, Assange wrote that this was ‘a fabrication’ and that Wired Magazine ‘has an agenda, doesn’t check facts and is not to be trusted’.\(^ {189}\)

Another example is when the relationship with The New York Times soured over the release of the Afghan documents. The Times did not link to WikiLeaks in its publications, because WikiLeaks refused to redact the names of informants. Assange did not respond to the criticism, merely repeating in anger that it was a lack of respect.\(^ {190}\) When The Times later published a critical profile of Assange, he spoke of a ‘smear campaign’ and demanded he be allowed to publish a response of equal length and a guarantee that The Times would never again publish negative information about him.\(^ {191}\) He also quarreled with The Guardian when it published the Swedish police files on Assange. He called it a betrayal and later severed his partnership.\(^ {192}\) When confronted during a televised interview with criticism that his

\(^{187}\) Submissions, section 2.0.
\(^{188}\) Katchadourian, No Secrets, 7 June 2010.
\(^{190}\) Keller, Dealing with Assange, 26 January 2011.
\(^{191}\) Leigh and Harding, WikiLeaks, 171-172.
personality was eclipsing the work of WikiLeaks, Assange refused to answer any questions, eventually walking out of the interview.\footnote{In-depth Africa.com, ‘Interview with Julian Assange’, CNN, 23 October 2010.}

On the website we can recently find that before any interview bid, WikiLeaks enters into correspondence first about the nature of the interview. For an interview with PBS Frontline, WikiLeaks wanted to know exactly how topics were to be addressed, even asking for editorial control over some segments in order to make sure that nothing damaging to Assange was going to be said. WikiLeaks even inquired to the closest business and personal relations of the interviewer and editors, in order to assess whether they could be biased.\footnote{WikiLeaks, WikiSecrets: Full Interview Footage.}

Domscheit-Berg also gives us an account of a zero tolerance to criticism. Anyone that voiced criticism was punished by a restriction of rights or suspension.\footnote{Domscheit-Berg, Inside WikiLeaks, 43.} Internal criticism was met with Assange’s ‘favorite slogan’: “Do not challenge leadership in times of crisis”.\footnote{Ibid., 200.} Jónsdóttir also recalls Assange’s reluctance to sort out the internal criticism of employees towards his form of leadership and the organizational structure. His refusal eventually caused her and some other members to leave the organization.\footnote{VPRO, “De WikiLeaks Code”, Tegenlicht, 4 January 2011, URL: \texttt{http://tegenlicht.vpro.nl/afleveringen/2010-2011/de-wikileaks-code.html}, as viewed on 21-04-2011.} The confidentiality agreement is also a sign of an attempt to silence criticism within the organization.\footnote{Ball, WikiLeaks; get out of the gagging game, 11 May 2011.}

WikiLeaks is not in the business of fostering dialogue and interaction about its publications with anyone. It explicitly only publishes classified information and nothing else. Everyone critical of the organization and its leader is met with heavy rebuttal. Internally, criticism is also heavily suppressed. The earlier quote in which he told Snorasson that if he had a problem with Assange, he could ‘piss off’, was said when he questioned Assange’s judgment over a number of issues.\footnote{Burns and Maiya, WikiLeaks Founder on the Run, 23 October 2010.} The reaction again shows the effects of the one leadership organization and how it affects the objectivity. If there is only opinion in the organization that matters, it is impossible to be impartial. This requires dialogue and diversity.

The quote shows an unwillingness to accept criticism. There appears to be one leading opinion, and if you don’t like it, you have no place in WikiLeaks.

\subsection*{6.3 Monitoring function}

The essence of the watchdog metaphor lies in the monitoring function. The media are expected to be vigilant of government activities in the public’s stead. It involves a dedication
to the public’s rights, an inquisitive and critical stance towards governmental activities, a proactive diverse agenda and an educating attitude towards the public. The analysis of WikiLeaks’ agenda setting was dealt with in the objectivity chapter. The remaining three elements of the operational definition in the theoretical framework will be explored in this chapter.

**Does WikiLeaks incorporate values of providing public service as a watchdog in its mission and strategy?**

For this analysis we first turn to the mission statement on the webpage in order to identify whether a dedication and connection to the rights of the public can be found in its mission. Deuze (2005) calls this dedication a shared value in journalism of ‘doing it for the people’. WikiLeaks’ mission statement is suffused with such claims. The first sentence describes WikiLeaks’ goal as being ‘to inform the public’. It goes on to state that one of the broader founding principles is ‘the defense of the freedom of speech and media’ in order to ‘support the rights of all people’. 200 It becomes even more explicit that WikiLeaks believes itself to be a watchdog for the people when it describes one of its tasks as to ensure that the public knows the true plans and behavior of their governments in order to allow them to ‘meaningfully choose to support or reject them’. WikiLeaks states it provides exactly this environment ‘through energetic and watchful media’. 201 Finally, WikiLeaks argues that by providing such public scrutiny it forces governments and corporations to ‘consider the ethical implications of their actions’. Through its dispersal of open facts it aims to enable and empower citizens to act when governments or corporations would abuse their powers. 202

WikiLeaks sees itself as a watchdog, informing the people, empowering the people, guarding over the rights of peoples, inquisitive, watchful, exposing abuses and so on. It has incorporated these values in its mission statement explicitly and extensively. It is the reason for its existence and a guide for its methods. So far, we have often seen a discrepancy between WikiLeaks’ lofty goals and what is being said and done in practice. The following chapter will go into the question whether WikiLeaks is indeed actively engaged in protecting the rights of the public in practice. Firstly by assessing whether WikiLeaks is actively critical towards governments and corporations and whether it actively investigates possible transgressions. Secondly, by assessing whether its publications and this questioning from their

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200 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 1.1.
201 Ibid., section 3.1.
202 Ibid., section 3.2.
part serves and protects the interests of the public. The question here is in some sense: “Is WikiLeaks a watchdog or a bulldog?”

**Does WikiLeaks actively investigate government and corporate practices?**

To be a responsible watchdog, it is not enough to passively accept new information and to publish it. The organization should possess a degree of activism in practice meant to safeguard possible transgressions by governments or corporations. WikiLeaks in its mission statement definitely recognizes this fact. In the section describing why WikiLeaks is important we find that it claims to be part of the media and that it sees as its task to scrutinize governments, which ‘leads to reduced corruption and stronger democracies’. This requires it to be ‘vibrant’ and ‘inquisitive’. In public also, Assange has reiterated this view. In one interview Assange stated that WikiLeaks must dedicate itself to uncover abuses for the public, and investigate them for police and policymakers.

Domscheit-Berg spoke of a vision at the beginning of WikiLeaks that would involve thousands of people, ‘digging out the dirt on governments’. Dutch WikiLeaks affiliate Rop Gronggrijp, spoke of a discrepancy between what the public knows and what is going on within the government. It is WikiLeaks’ wish to step in this gap of knowledge and actively research what is being hidden for the people. The WikiLeaks ideals seem to imply an understanding of a certain activism in informing itself in order to be able to protect the people.

We saw in the objectivity chapter that WikiLeaks’ does not solicit material. This disables WikiLeaks from actively investigating on its own possible infringements within the governments or institution where individuals have not leaked information to it. By nature of the setup, WikiLeaks cannot be watchful in these areas. It is bound to and limited by this principle. Recently, WikiLeaks has reiterated this point to avoid US accusations that WikiLeaks was coaching Bradley Manning to leak information, which would greatly increase the likelihood and grounds for prosecution.

WikiLeaks’ ‘scientific journalism’ is thus a passive species of journalism, depending on whistleblowers. There is no degree of activism to be found in this area. Assange has had to admit to this fact. In an interview he said that the public has no way of knowing where their

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203 Ibid., section 1.3.
205 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
rights are being threatened, but that the same goes for WikiLeaks. Only the persons on the inside, the leakers, know where. They will inform WikiLeaks. It does not do so by itself.\(^{208}\)

Many critics of WikiLeaks argue that the organization is not a watchdog for the public in practice at all. According to Aaron Bady, WikiLeaks is not meant to create oversight for the public. It is rather designed to create damage.\(^{209}\) He draws these conclusions from an analysis of the writings by Assange. From the blog by Assange called ‘State and Terrorist Conspiracies’, he distills what he believes to be the essence of WikiLeaks.\(^{210}\) The function of WikiLeaks is not to watch over the rights of people and to act in their stead in protest to specific government activities, but rather to disrupt the ability of governments to conspire and conceal in its entirety.\(^{211}\) According to Assange this is the only way in which to ‘radically shift regime behavior’.\(^{212}\) Blanken also believes that WikiLeaks cannot fulfill a watchdog role. According to him, WikiLeaks is not meant to be critical of governments in a constructive manner for the people. WikiLeaks strives for anarchy. Not a watchdog but a bulldog.\(^{213}\)

The answer to the question if WikiLeaks actively investigates government and corporation practices also partly involves the question of agenda setting which was dealt with extensively in the objectivity chapter. If WikiLeaks is to be watchful of transgressions and vigilant for the public it should pursue an active and wide agenda of topics. Naturally, WikiLeaks does not know up front where abuses occur, so it must investigate a diverse range of topics. In the analysis it became clear that not only is WikiLeaks dependent on the material it receives, but that it makes preferential choices based on economic, ideological and marketing objectives as well. This disables WikiLeaks from exploring other abuses and infringements on rights outside of this bias. So even if people leak information which reveal infringements on rights in an economically small or low profile sector, WikiLeaks can choose to withhold the publication of such information, because it prioritizes other interests. Domscheit-Berg acknowledges that many smaller profile abuses are being kept off the table in order to focus on documents concerning the United States.\(^{214}\) In theory WikiLeaks ought to be able to be critical of governments based on the material that it does publish. The following chapter will look into this question.

\(^{208}\) Greenberg, Julian Assange, 29 November 2010.
\(^{209}\) Aaron Bady, ‘Julian Assange and the Computer Conspiracy: “To destroy this invisible government”’, Wordpress Blog, 29 November 2010.
\(^{211}\) Bady, Julian Assange and the Computer Conspiracy, 29 November 2010.
\(^{212}\) Assange, State and Terrorist Conspiracies, 10 November 2006.
\(^{213}\) Blanken, Julian Assange als nar, 26 January 2011.
\(^{214}\) Rosenbach and Stark, Mir bleibt nur der Rückzug, 26 September 2010.
Does WikiLeaks with its publications illustrate the public the effects of government and corporate activities on their rights?

The previous chapters showed that WikiLeaks does not actively investigate specific activities by governments or corporations and that it does not publish all its material. At the hand of the information that it does publish, it can illustrate the public the effects of government and corporate activities on their rights. For some leaks it now distributes its material through traditional news agencies. We have already seen that this leaves it with no editorial control and therefore no possibilities of asking its own questions and highlighting the effects. Based on the material it has kept in house and published, we can see that WikiLeaks is most skeptical and critical of governments. As was said in the methodology chapter, media’s critical stance is to ensure a watchful, engaged and investigative attitude of the organization towards the rights of the public. It is important to remember here that being critical in the watchdog sense is meant to have an objective purpose, without motives other than the public interest. It should not be a blind attack on any government policies which might meet resistance amongst the public or WikiLeaks itself. So this question concerns itself with identifying whether the nature of the criticism and skepticism of the organization is to remind the public of its rights, and the relevance of its publications to the public interest as explained in the methodology chapter.

WikiLeaks offers articles together with the publication of the documents, according to the website, ‘indicating its significance to society’. We have also already seen that these stories are introductory, offering summaries of the content of each separate document. There are some instances in which we can recognize a greater good for the public; exposing corruption of the Kenyan government, tax evasion by the Julius Baer bank and the looting of Icelandic bank Kaupthing. If we look back to the analysis of the neutrality of presentation, we saw that in each instance the introductions to these publications were factual nonetheless, without an indication of why it was relevant for the people and public interest. Although it was presented with context, distilling the ultimate significance of the documents for society was still left up to the public itself. When WikiLeaks started claiming more media attention in 2010 not much changed.

If we look at the Collateral Murder video, the introductory analysis contains a description of events. It tells us that the United States had refused to share the video with Reuters and had claimed that the conduct of the soldiers was in concurrence with the Rules of

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215 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 1.2.
Engagement. In the run-up to publication WikiLeaks also questioned survivors of the incident. But apart from this, WikiLeaks undertook no further steps. It expects the public and traditional media to judge the relevance for themselves. No form of dialogue with the US government took place and there was no questioning from the part of WikiLeaks. Surely there is a hidden message in the editing and presentation of the video and we have seen what the intent of the video was, but there are no direct questions or investigative activities into what it means for the public interest or how it affects their rights.

The cables are another controversial leak. There are a few returning points of criticism to this publication. First, that it was an irresponsible and massive dump of data. We have seen that this is mostly incorrect. There was furthermore also a question of whether or not these cables even deserved publication. The question here is whether or not it is really in the public interest or used to smear the United States. Does it affect the rights of the public? Is there a protecting or informing purpose in releasing this specific classified information and does WikiLeaks show this? According to Johann Hari each of these WikiLeaks revelations was carefully weighed in order to ensure that it was in the public interest. Each of the revelations tells a story of ‘governments defying their citizens’ and hiding proof of this fact.  

Another point is that the cables are supposedly not newsworthy. With these publications WikiLeaks would not alter our views on how the US or the world works. As Keller rightly said, 99 percent of what is in the news does not alter our understanding of how the world works. ‘News mostly advances by inches’. Alan Rusbridger also deflects this argument, saying that it is mostly a partisan and patriotic argument made in the United States.

Returning to the point of governments defying their citizens and the public interest, Zakaria has said that if we read the cables we find nothing but back door enforcement of publicly proclaimed policies. This is not always true. If we look at a couple examples there are many cables which indeed have obvious revelations of governments defying their citizens in secrecy and are not part of simple public policies. The first revelation was that US diplomats were ordered to spy on UN officials and their fellow diplomats. One cable revealed that for instance Moscow’s mayor Luzhkov was head of a major system of corruption with close connections to Prime Minister Putin, enabling him to remain in office. And in Tunisia, we saw the extent of Ben Ali’s corruption and disregard for the rights of the people come to light. These leaks are indeed meaningful contributions and show the respective

217 Keller, Dealing with Assange, 26 January 2011.
218 Leigh and Harding, WikiLeaks, 321.
people that their rights are directly being invaded. This is not however always the case. Not all leaks are so clearly in the interest of the public. Some messages have nothing to do with revealing governments defying the rights of the people. One of the first cables named French President Sarkozy ‘charming but authoritarian’.\textsuperscript{219} Another one called Berlusconi ‘vain’ and ‘macho’.\textsuperscript{220} And the German Chancellor was nicknamed, Angela ‘Teflon’ Merkel for her calm demeanor, indecisiveness and lack of initiative in political debates.\textsuperscript{221}

Assange said that the cables would reveal ‘the contradictions between the US’s public persona and what it says behind closed doors’. It is important to know this information if citizens want their democracy to reflect their wishes.\textsuperscript{222} Certainly this cannot be said for all these cables or many of the other leaks such as an American fraternity handbook or a politicians’ personal e-mail. Much of the cables are personal assessments of US diplomats, revealing how they work, not revealing abuses, but making it more difficult now for them to execute their work. Assange has even himself said that one of the goals’ of the release was to make their work more difficult. This distrust comes from his distrust of secrecy. WikiLeaks wants to make it impossible for the organizations it exposes to operate in secrecy and it did not necessarily publish these documents in the public’s interest.

In the end it can be said that WikiLeaks in its mission statement and goals is absolutely dedicated to the goals and methods of a watchdog. In practice, it lacks a degree of proactive pursuance of an inquisitive and investigative attitude a watchdog should have. Its method for organizing material for publication is a passive one.

Secondly, the material it receives from whistleblowers has increasingly been handled with discrimination, resulting in one-sided choices based on economic, ideological and marketing objectives, resulting in a bias towards the United States especially in 2010. The examples of publications show that many of the publications in 2010 are not meant to be watchful of democratic processes in its pure sense, but to harden the work of any organization that makes use of secrecy in order to perform their tasks and opposes WikiLeaks ideologically, in this case the US. As the analysis of its agenda shows, it is not the intention of WikiLeaks to criticize a specific policy in the public interest with the release of its material or to guard specific interests. It is the intention of WikiLeaks to disrupt these organizations’ ability to operate in secrecy of any kind, malign or benign. In the case of the cables this is

\textsuperscript{220} Annalisa Piras, ‘WikiLeaks cables portrait of Silvio Berlusconi is a worry beyond Italy’, \textit{The Guardian}, 3 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{222} Assange, Secret US Embassy cables, 28 November 2010.
clearly visible. It was said that monitoring was walking a fine line between watchdog responsibilities and objectivity. Monitoring should be in the public interest without any further motive. WikiLeaks is ‘barking’ at the government in its own interest, not specifically towards any policy, but towards government itself and not primarily in the public’s interest. The implications hereof will be further discussed in the discussion of the results after the analysis into WikiLeaks’ transparency.

6.4 Organizational transparency

In the previous chapters we have already uncovered much of the information needed to answer the sub-questions drafted for analysis into the organizational transparency of WikiLeaks. For this analysis it has to be reiterated that it is not so much important to determine for instance which standards and guidelines an organization has in practice, but much more whether it offers openness and insight into these matters in a structured and transparent manner.

Does WikiLeaks provide openness about its owners, organizational and financial structure?

The study of the autonomy of WikiLeaks revealed some details about its organizational structure. WikiLeaks is a pyramid structured organization with one man at the top and a financial structure that is built to ensure the anonymity of its financial benefactors and those providing services. The information was hard to find and came mostly from the interpretation of accounts from former employees, journalists that had come into contact with WikiLeaks and statements made in the press by WikiLeaks. The website offers little to no information about what the organization looks like. The information is limited to: ‘WikiLeaks is an independent global group of people with a long standing dedication to the idea of a free press and the improved transparency in society that comes from this. The group includes accredited journalists, software programmers, network engineers, mathematicians and others’.  

As for the financial structure of WikiLeaks the same can be said. There are no records of financial assets or budgets on the WikiLeaks website. There are no numbers about donations to be found anywhere. There are three possible ways indicated in which to donate money to WikiLeaks. In addition, there is also a redirect to a Facebook page where one can donate money to the Julian Assange Legal Defense Fund. The German Wau Holland

223 Introduction to WikiLeaks, section 1.5.
Foundation which has been said to accept and disperse WikiLeaks’ funds is bound by law to keep all information secret and is not even mentioned on the website. The entire structure has been set up explicitly to ensure that everything remains hidden. There is one instance in which WikiLeaks published information about its donors when such a document was presented to them as a leak in their electronic drop box. Domscheit-Berg then said that: “it proves that we are transparent”. But that was a small thing and for WikiLeaks a long time ago.

There is a reason why this information is hard to find. It is part of policy. In an interview with Australian television, Assange explains that WikiLeaks is very much aware of some of the legal and intelligence forces that are against the work of WikiLeaks and that this is why the organization is ‘sensible’ and takes necessary security precautions. The confidentiality agreement is a reflection of this policy to ensure that details about the directors, the organization and financial assets are never released into the public sphere and remain secret. Assange himself has said in frustration of the media’s focus on WikiLeaks’ intransparency that “it doesn’t matter who WikiLeaks is, what matters is what WikiLeaks does”. It shows that he has a disregard for the fact that with publications of such magnitude trust and transparency is essential.

Does WikiLeaks provide openness about their internal guidelines and standards for publishing their information?

Assange himself has said that it is important to know what WikiLeaks does. From the normative principles of transparency follows that it is however equally important to know how WikiLeaks does what it does. The information WikiLeaks publishes about its methods proves to be very limited. In total, the entire explanation of WikiLeaks’ methods consists of two pages on its website. These pages explain that when information is leaked to WikiLeaks, its journalists ‘analyze the material, verify it and write a news piece about it describing its significance to society’. It has furthermore developed a harm minimization procedure, designed to delay or censor material when it is possible that the publication thereof could endanger human lives. This is the extent to which WikiLeaks informs its readers.

Concerning the veracity checks the website states that it submits its documents through a very detailed examination a procedure. It uses traditional investigative journalism techniques as well as more modern technology-based methods. It includes a forensic analysis.

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225 Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
227 Ibid.
228 Introduction to WikiLeaks, URL: http://www.wikileaks.ch/about.html.
of the document, determination of the cost of forgery, means, motive, opportunity, the claims of apparent authoring organization, and answer a set of other detailed questions about the document.\footnote{Ibid., section 1.4.} This is the extent of the description of the ‘very detailed’ examination.

Additional information on these procedures is absent. It is not made clear which traditional investigative techniques are used. Neither is there information on the modern technology-based methods, nor on the set of detailed questions about the document.

The harm minimization procedure also lacks transparency. It is mentioned twice on the website without further details. WikiLeaks explains the reason for these procedures but does not give insight into which criteria determine what information is censored, when it is censored, how it is redacted and so on. A procedure leads to the expectation that there is a systematic approach, but there is no insight into how this minimizing of harm works which has led to much speculation. It has been said by sources within The Times, The Guardian and Der Spiegel that when publishing the Afghan war documents, Assange refused to redact the names of low level informants, saying: \textit{“Well, they’re informants. So if they get killed, they’ve got it coming to them. They deserve it”}.\footnote{Leigh and Harding, \textit{WikiLeaks}, 111.} Assange himself has denied having said this.\footnote{WikiLeaks, \textit{WikiSecrets: Full Interview Footage}.}

To examine the standards for publishing the first thing to look at are WikiLeaks’ criteria for publication. According to the website these are: ‘\textit{restricted or censored material of political, ethical, diplomatic or historical significance}’. Furthermore, WikiLeaks will only publish material that is not publicly available, unless it feels that that information has not received the ‘proper news analysis’ it deserved and is in the public interest.\footnote{Submissions, section 2.4.} As for guidelines on the quality of articles or documents WikiLeaks says its journalists write a news piece that describes its documents, with an indication of why it is important to be published and what it means to broader society.

There are no specific details to be found on when WikiLeaks considers something to be of ‘political, ethical, diplomatic or historical significance’ and when something is in the public interest. There simply are no further references to these procedures or criteria to be found. And so for an outsider it is not transparent when exactly WikiLeaks decides to write about a leak. The same goes for a description of what is in the public interest or important to publish or ‘a proper news analysis’. If this is the distinction it makes to decide when it publishes information and when it is important for the public, it should offer a transparent account of its content and criteria.
We have seen that there is much controversy about the goals that WikiLeaks has with its publications. An explanation of the choices it makes to come to these publications would greatly add to its transparency. An extreme scenario would be that perhaps this information is not made available because WikiLeaks does not have a more detailed set of guidelines and standards. But even if this were the case, it deliberately chooses not to be transparent. If we read the confidentiality agreement we see under section B that employees are also prohibited to disclose any information on the internal policies and the workings of WikiLeaks.

**Does WikiLeaks provide openness into criticism and is it willing to acknowledge and correct mistakes?**

We have seen that WikiLeaks only publishes official classified documents. Opinions or other editorial articles are not published. Obviously, the same goes for critical articles about WikiLeaks. As we saw earlier, internal criticism is also repressed. WikiLeaks has published emails along with documents of parties asking for removal of their documents. Even though some of these emails contain some critical notes, publishing them is not part of an intrinsic policy to be open about criticism. It does this only to support the authenticity of documents.\(^{233}\) Domscheit-Berg even described this process as ‘fun messing around with them’.\(^{234}\)

Of course, publishing delicate information about corporations, governments and individuals is bound to ignite a counter reaction from those implicated. WikiLeaks receives many emails from these groups outraged about the fact that their names appear on its website. Domscheit-Berg tells us that he and Assange were very wary about correcting publications and such requests. They were always suspicious of hidden agendas when requests for removal of possible wrong or false information came in. He says they developed a sixth sense for cover up motives from those making the request.\(^{235}\) There has however been one known incident in which WikiLeaks has acknowledged a mistake. This happened when it published the documents on Julius Baer, which contained a name which was mistaken with a similar name, but belonged to an entirely different person. WikiLeaks decided not to correct the document, but to add footnotes instead explaining the matter. There are no further incidents in which WikiLeaks has given openness into possible mistakes made.

Many critics claim that WikiLeaks does not live up to the standards of transparency it sets to governments and corporations. Time Magazine’s Editor-in-Chief Richard Stengel has

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\(^{234}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{235}\) Ibid., 27.
called it hypocrisy defending a policy of secrecy in order to attack it in others.\textsuperscript{236} Domscheit-Berg nowadays describes the confidentiality agreement as an instrument to cultivate intransparency and repress information within WikiLeaks.\textsuperscript{237} All this seems to be true if we look at WikiLeaks. Information is hard to find.

Not only is the information hard to find, it is also conflicting and it appears to be so deliberately. We have encountered numerous examples thus far. The one where WikiLeaks claimed to be set up by Chinese dissidents and turned out not to be. The veracity checks which supposedly were conducted with forensic precision and turned out to be Google queries combined with common sense. The greatly exaggerated infrastructure of volunteers in the thousands and an enormous international legal and technological network, which turned out to be names on an e-mail list, one server and a few sympathetic lawyers.\textsuperscript{238} We have also seen that WikiLeaks fed rumors about being a CIA operation in order to raise its profile. WikiLeaks employee Ben Laurie has defended that the conflicting information saying it is a good thing. According to him, there is no need to inform possible powerful adversaries and so no use for transparency.\textsuperscript{239} This has been the same argument put forward by Assange.

WikiLeaks fails to create an environment in which it can generate trust among its readers. Assange wants the world to discuss what WikiLeaks is publishing and not how. But for that to happen, the public must trust the messenger. It must know that it is dealing with a media organization of integrity. An organization that actively fosters intransparency about its structure and methods and is repressive of criticism does exactly the opposite.

In WikiLeaks’ defense it must be said that the means it could use to foster transparency are constantly being fought by certain governments and companies. In their opposition to WikiLeaks’ publications many have repeatedly tried to disrupt its infrastructure. These attempts have succeeded and WikiLeaks servers and websites are unstable and frequently offline. These external factors would make it hard if not impossible for WikiLeaks to be transparent if it wanted to. Given the fact that WikiLeaks is deliberately intransparent this point might seem less relevant to this discussion, but it is nonetheless worth mentioning because it is most certainly detrimental to WikiLeaks’ potential to ever become a successful media organization because it is being prevented to perform its tasks.

\textsuperscript{236} Richard Stengel, ‘Secrets and Lies. The WikiLeaks release of classified material harms American security, but it also suggests problems with the culture of secrecy’, \textit{Time Magazine} (December 2010), 4.
\textsuperscript{237} David Batty, ‘Ex-WikiLeaks spokesman criticises Assange’s gagging order for staff’, \textit{The Guardian}, 13 May 2011.
\textsuperscript{238} Domscheit-Berg, \textit{Inside WikiLeaks}, 23.
\textsuperscript{239} Symington, Exposed, 1 September 2009.
7. Results

The analysis showed that WikiLeaks has high aspirations on publishing the factual truth, verifying its sources and providing context to its publications. It also showed that WikiLeaks turned out to have published information it knew to be false and that it has misrepresented the extent of its verification process. When exposed for these practices, WikiLeaks did not stand corrected. It defended its publications. WikiLeaks is an organization in which the editorial choices are made by management and can be said to reflect company policy. In this case it is a deterioration of its dedication to the principle of providing accurate information with appropriate guidelines hereto. This is further underlined by its reluctance to publish reader’s feedback in the form of comments, corrections and criticism.

The requirement to be objective was based on the liberal democratic principle that the public has to decide which direction society moves in. The public must not be misguided in this process. Although WikiLeaks’ philosophy of absolute transparency aspires to do this, with its publications and organizational structure WikiLeaks showed little respect for this principle. Sometimes caused by something as simple as a language barrier, but in the final analysis the organization proved to have gradually developed an agenda of its own, resulting in a one-sided range of issues and one-sided, biased and opinionated reporting. The agenda has increasingly been made up by marketing and ideological motives and ignores its responsibility towards the public. It wants the biggest exposure, to achieve political reform and it wants to disrupt governments’ abilities to operate in secrecy. On top of that, it refuses to enter into dialogue and interaction about its publications with anyone. The analysis showed that WikiLeaks’ methods do not create an image of objectivity, but and of bias and that it resembles political and ideological activism.

WikiLeaks’ mission statement was suffused with watchdog ideals, but a look into practice proved that these ideals lead to little substantial activities. There are no inquisitive, proactive and investigative processes set in motion by WikiLeaks. The nuance stressed in the theoretical framework between the critical stance of a watchdog and neutral stance of a media organization is exactly where WikiLeaks fails. Its criticism towards governments is not primarily to responsibly safeguard the rights of the public, but constitutes a destructive, biased and reckless attitude.

Transparency proved the most difficult test for WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks is deliberately intransparent and wishes to remain so. That fact that practically no information is at hand was
proof of this. The confidentiality agreement is a sign of why we can expect it to remain so.

We saw in the theoretical framework that a well operating information function is necessary to be objective and that both are equally necessary to be able to exercise a responsible monitoring role. Transparency would strengthen these three. WikiLeaks in its ideals commits itself to these criteria, but it cannot live up to them. Each function fails the normative comparison. Perfection is impossible, but if we remember the conclusion by Westerstahl on objectivity: ‘Even if total objectivity is not feasible, it is imperative that media attempt to abide by objectivity guidelines, because it is the people that must ultimately decide and not media’. WikiLeaks has drafted some of these guidelines, but practice proves that it does not strive to abide by them as much as possible, but that it even consciously strays from them. By doing this, WikiLeaks manages to create uncertainty and mistrust.

We saw that these organizational defects have made WikiLeaks extremely vulnerable to criticism and external pressure as well. A failing objectivity and transparency for instance makes it easy for affected governments, companies and competitors such as media to discredit WikiLeaks and damage any image of reliability it may build. Moreover, the nature of the organization’s publications has also made it susceptible and victim to hard opposition. This leads to expect that even if WikiLeaks were a shining example of responsible journalism, it would have been opposed due to the nature of its publications. These external factors also have a significant negative effect on its potential to become a watchdog, regardless of its own performances.

The appearance of WikiLeaks in this respect has led to a development set in motion by governments that is counterproductive to the evolution the press has undergone since it saw itself firmly established into the fabric of Western societies in the early 19th century. It is also contrary to the responsibilities that are expected in normative theory of the government towards the press, namely protection of its freedom. An interesting result is that in societies where freedom of the press enjoys a near holy status, such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States, WikiLeaks is met with at least as much opposition as in traditionally repressive countries such as China.

If we look at the quadrant of normative traditions, we see that based on the analysis WikiLeaks can be seen in an environment of pluralism on the vertical axis because it operates in a realm with global and instantaneous reach. Its publications are significant in a transnational arena and it is therefore active in an environment with great cultural diversity. On the horizontal axis it operates free from any government control and is against any form of government control. One of its unique features due to the possibilities of the internet is that it
cannot be controlled or held accountable by any government. But more importantly, the new possibilities also weaken the self-regulating effect of clients leaving when trust diminishes meaning the end of an organization. This system of accountability no longer applies to WikiLeaks. It does not take much means to keep a website such as WikiLeaks online and that is all it takes for it to publish on a vast global scale. This new feature has left governments with no answer other than a move backwards towards authoritarian behavior.

Western democracies often credit themselves for their extensive possibilities for citizen involvement in decision-making, their diversity, pluralism and their freedom of expression. In November 2009 Hillary Clinton held a speech in which she said that “even in authoritarian countries, information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable” and that “the more freely information flows the stronger societies become”.240 But it appears that WikiLeaks has touched on a new limit to these nations’ interpretation of the ideal of freedom of the press and the role of media in society. Where they claim that in their society the press is a free enterprise with government intervention only to protect the freedom of the press as its responsibility and to foster the government’s accountability, we saw that this attitude does not apply to WikiLeaks. In this case, the US government for instance is trying to find a loophole in the freedom of the press in order to enact more repressive and authoritarian policies of simply silencing and prosecuting disseminators of information that it does not want to see published.

In short, WikiLeaks has made governments try to move from a situation where they advertise freedom of the press to a situation where they wished they could exercise more authoritarian control over the media and in which they are actively pursuing these policies. The United States are for instance preparing a piece of legislation that will equip the President with a selective ‘internet kill switch’ to silence great portions of the internet in his country at the touch of single button. If WikiLeaks were to evolve into a professional organization of integrity with responsible, accountable and transparent guidelines, it is highly probable that it would still face a serious hurdle for it to behave as and become a reliable and accepted watchdog in society if such fundamental opposition would persist.

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8. Conclusion

The analysis offers a characterization of WikiLeaks as a flawed organization when it comes to being a responsible, vigilant, informative, objective and transparent media organization by normative standards. The analysis of the criticism towards WikiLeaks however, showed that there are also accusations made towards WikiLeaks that if one studies the organization are simply not true. WikiLeaks has for instance evolved beyond just mass dumping data.

But there are also many grounds for some of the criticisms that have been voiced towards WikiLeaks. WikiLeaks cannot live up to common principles of good journalism. It knowingly spreads false information to enforce political change, it does not always verify its information and when it does, this is weak. It conveys opinions and presents information in a biased manner, removing the public’s ability to take the information at face value. One of the most important principles there is to journalism if we look at the position of the press in the democratic process from a theoretical perspective. If there is an agenda to be identified within WikiLeaks, protecting the rights of the public is not it. But rather engaging authority, the biggest it can find. And finally, WikiLeaks is in the simplest terms the opposite of a transparent organization. This makes it difficult for the organization to earn a necessary degree of trust from the public. The fact that the organization is so elusive and can operate so freely without being accountable to anyone does not help this problem. The elements that make up the concept of the watchdog used in this framework present a too big a threshold for WikiLeaks so far.

As an answer to the research question, WikiLeaks therefore has not yet developed a solid enough basis to argue that it will soon earn its place as a viable addition in the current media spectrum. If we remember the metaphorical characterizations of media from the introduction by Christians he mentions three types, ‘a watchdog controlling the power holders, a lapdog serving the master, and a guard dog looking after vested interest.’ It is the opinion of this writer that WikiLeaks is neither three, but indeed more of a bulldog. If we look at WikiLeaks’ behavior it becomes clear that being a responsible watchdog or medium is also not the goal of its actions. Nothing in the analysis points to a change of heart from the part of WikiLeaks in the near future.

Aside from the performance of WikiLeaks by the normative standards of the framework, its potential is also strongly negatively affected by the opposition from parties it has offended with the publication of its material. Affected governments are looking for ways
to halt its activities, companies deny services to WikiLeaks under these pressures and media are generally wary of this new competitor. We saw in the discussion of the results that these are tendencies that would take us back several historical perspectives to a situation where governments want to exert more authority over the press and set limits to the freedom it has acquired. These reactions of some governments are not only significant just for WikiLeaks but for the entire media spectrum.

WikiLeaks has given contemporary media something substantial to think about. In a recent article in De Volkskrant, it was said the WikiLeaks was ‘much ado about nothing’ and that WikiLeaks itself did not differ much from traditional media. It reflects an often heard comment by media on WikiLeaks, focusing on the content of publication, rather than on the manner in which it publishes and what it means for media and its place in the democratic process. Even though WikiLeaks may not be the ideal watchdog or a shining example of good journalism, WikiLeaks is still in the business of publishing information, just as any other media organization. And WikiLeaks has found a new way of attaining information that traditional media where receiving sporadically and is being challenged heavily because of this. This is a most relevant development and challenge for journalism with real effects for international relations.

In 1969 Daniel Ellsberg spent hundreds of hours over a Xerox machine secretly copying 7,000 classified documents about the Vietnam War. When he was finished, he handed over his documents to The New York Times, hoping it would expose his government for the hidden policies behind the war. He then waited at home for three months, wondering if, and when he would see his story on the front page of his newspaper, while its editors discussed whether or not to publish this. Ellsberg is the classical whistleblower. WikiLeaks has made it its core business to air information brought to it by whistleblowers. By using the newest technological encryptions what had taken Ellsberg months, is now a matter of minutes.

Governments, journalists and even normative theorists must find new ways to deal with the challenges this presents other than repression. Challenges presented because of its renewed method for acquiring and publishing delicate whistleblower material with complete unanimity for its sources, but also because WikiLeaks has become an expanding and seemingly unstoppable, unaccountable phenomenon. WikiLeaks is no longer alone in this and if anything follows from this thesis, it is that WikiLeaks should not be alone.
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**Documents**


**Web articles**


**Websites**


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On December 3 2010, the official WikiLeaks website (www.WikiLeaks.org) was pulled from the servers of EveryDNS that hosted it. Soon afterwards a number of mirror websites appeared on the internet, providing for most of the information formerly posted on the WikiLeaks website.

List of mirror websites of WikiLeaks.org:

- wikileaks.ch – New Official WikiLeaks Page
- wikileaks.fi – Mirror Finland
- wikileaks.nl – Mirror Netherlands
- wikileaks.de – Mirror Germany
- wikileaks.eu – Mirror Europe
- wikileaks.pl – Mirror Poland
- wikileaks.at – Mirror Austria
- wikileaks.lu – Mirror Luxembourg
- wikileaks.se – Mirror Sweden
- wikileaks.no – Mirror Norway
- wikileaks.is – Mirror Iceland
- nyud.bet – Mirror United States
- wikileaks.ca – Mirror Canada
- mirror.wikileaks.info – Mirror of previous leaks
### Appendix I: Qualitative data

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<td>6 December 2010</td>
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<td>article</td>
<td>Wired</td>
<td>Annabel Symington</td>
<td>1 September 2009</td>
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<td>article</td>
<td>Wired</td>
<td>Kevin Poulsen</td>
<td>18 October 2010</td>
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Wikileaks dossier
Cables
Julian Assange
Cables
The War Logs

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9/11 excerpts
US Air Force exposes troops, Iraqis to cancer agents
Australia secretly censors WikiLeaks press release and Danish Internet Censorship
Sarah Palin Yahoo inbox
U.S. Intelligence planned to destroy WikiLeaks
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Interview: Julian Assange

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Press statement: cables
WikiLeaks Secrets: Julian Assange Full Interview Footage
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Wikileaks and the Long Haul
Wikileaks draait om de boodschap, niet om de clash tussen nieuwe en oude media
Julian Assange als nar die zegt wat we niet willen weten

The unknown blogger who changed WikiLeaks coverage
Reuters drop Beirut photographer
Bank of America stops handling Wikileaks payments
How Wikileaks helped fuel Tunisian Revolution
Wat hebben de Julius Baer bank en de Church of Scientology met elkaar in het gemeen?
Assange leverde Nederlandse cables bewust voor nieuwe missie Afghanistan
Assange breekt met Guardian en deelt lekken met Telegraph
Nog een ambtenaar vroeg om persoonlijke druk op Bos
En daar was Wikileaks weer - opeens
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Kamermeerderheid wil spoeddebat over JSF
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Wikileaks' Julian Assange wants to spill your corporate secrets
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NYT's Keller Almost Ready to Admit Wikileaks Is Journalism
Peru: Wikileaks and the Presidential Campaign
Herfried Münkler on State secrets and their disclosure
WikiLeaks, the First Amendment, and the Press
Cree que lo revelado por los Wikileaks afecten el resultado del proceso electoral
Good Manners in the Age of Wikileaks
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How Wikileaks gags its own staff
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Live with the WikiLeaks-world or shut down the net. It's your choice
WikiLeaks, get out of the gagging game
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Ex-WikiLeaks spokesman criticizes Assange's gagging order for staff
US scrambles to restore Afghan relations after Wikileaks revelations
Wikileaks cables: Hillary Clinton meets Ban Ki-moon after spying revelations
Wikileaks cables: CIA drew up UN spying wishlist for diplomats
Wikileaks row: Putin labels US embassy cables 'slanderous'
Wikileaks cables: 'Nicolas Sarkozy thin-skinned and authoritarian'
Wikileaks row: China wants Korean reunification, officials confirm
Julian Assange given extradition appeal hearing date
Wikileaks supporters disrupt Visa and MasterCard sites in 'Operation Payback'
Wikileaks website pulled by Amazon after US political pressure
Ecuador asks US Ambassador to leave over Wikileaks row
US Ambassador to Mexico resigns over Wikileaks embassy cables
Wikileaks cables portrait of Silvio Berlusconi is a worry beyond Italy
US Embassy Cables: Saudi King urges US strike on Iran
Wikileaks, Revolution and the Lost Cojones of American Journalism
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Reuters asks a chain to remove its bylines
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Group seeks public access to congressional research
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No Secrets: Julian Assange's mission for total transparency
China makes moves to censor Wikileaks 'Cablegate' release of US diplomatic communications
How Wikileaks keeps its funding secret
Defending the leaks: Q&A with WikiLeaks' Julian Assange
The War on Secrecy
It's not so bad
Secrets and Lies
In conversation with Julian Assange
Why Wikileaks Is Good for America
Exposed: Wikileaks' secrets
No, we don't hate Wikileaks
http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2010/12/wikileaks-editorial/
http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2009/10/start/exposed-wikileaks-secrets?pay
http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2010/10/wikileaks-wired/
Confidentiality Agreement

Between:

1. WIKILEAKS ITC Ltd. and

2. [Redacted]

Whereas:

Access to and contact with Staff, volunteers and facilities of WikiLeaks from 2010, on different locations and via different means of communication, including but not limited to access to confidential information, confidential electronic and telephonic communications and meetings, facilities, locations, policies, documents, archives, files, records, and other materials which are solely the property of WikiLeaks.

B. WikiLeaks is in possession of documents (including electronic, audio and audio visual), analysis thereof and associated materials which contain newsworthy information whether or not such information is marked as confidential. It includes but it is not limited to any communication, including emails, written communications, meeting records, information exchanged in meetings or discussions and other newsworthy facts (the “information”). The information shall also include the fact and content of this agreement and all newsworthy information relating to the workings of WikiLeaks, including without limitation its organisational structure and processes, the location of management assets, professional and personal information of all members of WikiLeaks Staff, Volunteers and Directors;

C. Various news providers, publishers and broadcasters commercial and otherwise are seeking access to the information from WikiLeaks and/or members of their Staff, Volunteers and Directors, either personal or professional, on an exclusive (in whole or in part) basis. They may make agreements or engage in ventures with WikiLeaks constraining them from the publication of such information except on terms, in consideration for receipt of such information;

D. WikiLeaks performance of the aforementioned agreements and in particular the provision of exclusivity thereto will be compromised by any breach of this agreement. We therefore require you to sign this agreement, which takes effect as a Deed. This is a legally enforceable document; and

E. By reason of the matters set out in A- D above herein any breach by you is likely to cause loss and damage to WikiLeaks including without limitation loss and damage in the nature of:

a. Loss of opportunity to sell the information to other news broadcasters and publishers;

b. Loss of reputation;

c. Loss of opportunity to execute future agreements with regard to the information;

d. Loss of value of the information;

e. Loss of opportunity to execute future agreements in relation to other information by reason of loss of reputation;

f. Possible legal proceedings against WikiLeaks for loss of value to parties to other agreements.
The parties hereby agree as follows:

1. All information, as defined above, provided by WikiLeaks is **confidential** and remains the property of WikiLeaks.

2. Not disclose to any third party or use for his own benefit or for the benefit of any third party, any of the information without the prior written consent of WikiLeaks.

3. Nothing contained in this agreement shall be construed as giving you any licence or other rights in or with respect to any of the information and for the avoidance of doubt all rights in the information, whether in the nature of or copyright or otherwise remains the property of WikiLeaks and or its sources.

4. Any and all information disclosed to you is disclosed without any liability on the part of WikiLeaks.

5. The parties agree that a genuine and reasonable pre-estimate of the loss to WikiLeaks from a breach of this agreement based on a typical open market valuation for the information for a **significant breach** of the agreement is in the region of £12,000,000 (twelve million pounds sterling).

6. This agreement will terminate by mutual agreement in a written form.

7. **This agreement will terminate without notice notwithstanding the absence of any breach.**

8. You accept and agree that the information disclosed, or to be disclosed to you pursuant to this agreement is, by its nature, valuable proprietary commercial information, the misuse or unauthorised disclosure of which would be likely to cause us considerable damage, and accordingly you concede that, without prejudice to any other rights and remedies which may be available to us in respect of any breach of this Agreement, we are entitled to relief by way of injunction including any interim order available from any competent court having jurisdiction over its terms.

9. This Agreement shall be governed by English law and the parties hereby irrevocably submit to the non-exclusive jurisdiction of the English courts. This agreement supersedes all prior agreements and understandings between the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof.

**EXECUTED AS A DEED BY:**

WikiLeaks: ........................................

**Julian Assange**

in the presence of:

Witness' signature:

Witness' name:

Address:

Occupation:
Signed as a Deed: ................................................
Name: .................................................................
Date: .................................................................

in the presence of:
Witness' signature:
Witness' name:
Address:
Occupation: