The Politics of Cyberspace (4):
WikiLeaks – Responsibility or Vandalism?

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This article continues with pointers to links from the completely revised IS407 "Politics of Cyberspace"< http://www.mekabay.com/courses/academic/norwich/is407/index.htm > course that started in January 2011. In this section, I'm continuing to present interesting interviews and articles about WikiLeaks< http://wikileaks.info/ >.

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Brooke Gladstone, director of the National Public Radio program *On the Media* < http://www.onthemedia.org/ >*,* interviewed analyst Steven Aftergood, who "is the longtime writer of the email newsletter and blog, Secrecy News. For years he's reported and researched government secrecy and advocated for U.S. government transparency. He's no stranger to the antagonism between secrecy and disclosure. But in recent months he's been a critic of WikiLeaks and its methods."< http://www.onthemedia.org/transcripts/2010/07/30/02 >

Aftergood argued, "…[T]here was a pattern of activity by WikiLeaks in which they were disclosing confidential records of social and religious groups, like the Masons and the Mormons and several others, that did not reveal any misconduct. And it seemed to me that they were using the posture of transparency as a kind of weapon against disfavored groups. And, to me, that was a really repugnant thing to do." He said that Wikileaks "have a long ways to go in developing a code of conduct. I would also say that in the U.S., the political process is still flexible enough that it is possible to put forward an argument for a change in policy and to see that change put into practice. We've seen more than a billion pages of historically valuable records declassified since 1995. So I look with a little bit of concern at the broadsides that WikiLeaks is launching at the classification system. They seem oriented not towards fixing it but towards defeating it."

Noam Chomsky< http://www.chomsky.info/ > was interviewed by Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now*< http://www.democracynow.org > about his analysis of the WikiLeaks release of hundreds of thousands of secret US State Department cables.< http://www.democracynow.org/2010/11/30/noam_chomsky_wikileaks_cables_reveal_profound > Chomsky commented that some of the contents released by WikiLeaks "reveals … the profound hatred for democracy on the part of our political leadership." He said, "The materials—we should understand—and the Pentagon Papers is another case in point—[demonstrate] that one of the major reasons for government secrecy is to protect the government from its own population. In the Pentagon Papers, for example, there was one volume, the negotiations volume, which might have had bearing on ongoing activities, and Dan Ellsberg withheld that. That came out a little bit later. But if you look at the Papers themselves, there are things that Americans should have known that the government didn't want them to know. And as far as I can tell, from what I've seen here, pretty much the same is true. In fact, the current leaks are—what I've seen, at least—primarily interesting because of what they tell us about how the diplomatic service works."

One of the most entertaining clips in the IS407 list of suggested references is a debate between Salon.com writer Glenn Greenwald< http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/index.html > and longtime advocate for reduction of government secrecy Steven Aftergood< http://www.fas.org/sgp/aftergood.html >. In "Is WikiLeaks' Julian Assange a Hero?"< http://www.democracynow.org/2010/12/3/is_wikileaks_julian_assange_a_hero >, the two articulated different perspectives on the effects of WikiLeaks disclosures.

Daniel Ellsberg< http://www.ellsberg.net/ >, famous – or notorious, depending on one's political perspective – for leaking the Pentagon Papers< http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB48/ > in 1971 about the origins of the US war against Vietnam, argued that ""If I released the Pentagon Papers today, the same rhetoric and the same calls would be made about me. I would be called not only a traitor—which I was then, which was false and slanderous—but I would be called a terrorist... Assange and Bradley Manning< http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/86525/20101129/us-wikileaks-bradley-manning-factfile-who-is.htm > are no more terrorists than I am."

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