

THE WIKILEAKS REVOLUTION

Raoul Chiesa



RAOUL CHIESA is a well-known European expert on informational security. In the 1990s he was known to be among the first Italian hackers, but he eventually turned to consulting on security issues after establishing his own company – Mediaservice.net. He is one of the founders of CLUSIT, the Italian Association for Informational Security. Since 2003, Chiesa has been cooperating with the agency UNICRI (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute), which operates under the aegis of the UN

■ *The technical preconditions for the creation of Wikileaks existed since long ago. Why do you think that Wikileaks was created and why it has become so famous now? What has ultimately changed since the moment that blogs became a political phenomenon?*

Actually, Wikileaks has been in existence for a few years already. I think that, right now, Assange is experiencing his own apogee, meaning that he has reached the peak of visibility in terms of his

projects and ideas. Probably this is happening due to a combination of reasons and motivations, while it is mostly occurring because of the huge, enormous international press coverage that he is receiving. Also, all of those DDoS (DDoS – Distributed Denial of Service) attacks launched ‘on behalf’ of Julian Assange have received so much attention and visibility, meaning even more press coverage, as well as speculations. Thus, I suppose that this whole mix of factors has contributed to bringing about this incredible emergence of Wikileaks.

■ *There was a certain kind of solidarity among diplomats from all over the world, who claimed to refuse to use the documents that were revealed by Wikileaks. At the same time, we also see that there was no significant change in world affairs following this scandal. So, what was it all about? Does this represent some sort of a breakthrough or not?*

How can you state that there have not been changes in world affairs? First of all, I think that it is too early to make such a claim. **Also, I do not think that this WikiCables leak will change world affairs either directly or in the short term.** Governments rely on business more foremostly than diplomatic relationships. Diplomatic practice itself is based on ‘smiles’ and savoir-faire. What I mean is that this would not be the very first time that a government spoke unfairly about another country; nevertheless, business relations between

Wikileaks – in this last case, the WikiCables – has been on the segregation of duty and the ‘need to know’ principle. After 9/11, US agencies agreed that there has been a lack of communication, information sharing and intelligence updates. Due to this, such activities have been expanded, and Julian’s project has demonstrated to us that the exchange of information has actually become way too active after 9/11.

■ *Does the phenomenon of Wikileaks mean that states are losing their monopoly on the control over the information they provide to their societies? Is Wikileaks a shift to a new era of openness, when it will no longer be possible to play a ‘double game’ and hold some agreements and facts in secret?*

To answer the first part of your question, no, I don’t think so. In fact, those cables didn’t contain anything ‘surprising’, meaning that they were – mostly – reporting news and feedbacks that we are already used to reading in the standard press, both in the national or international media. Regarding the second part of your question, indeed, my answer is yes. Wikileaks demands greater transparency, and it is very probable that, from now on, **governments will have much more difficulty keeping their arguments secret – or, at least, that may be the case for those nations where IT is something mandatory.** What I mean is that there is a high probability that initiatives such as Wikileaks would have less of an

Wikileaks is the 21st century version of the Gutenberg revolution

those two countries were still maintained.

Despite this, economic relations between the US and other countries are continuing. **The impact of**

effect on less IT-advanced countries.

■ *Are there technical means capable of protecting us from such exces-*

sive openness, when any secrets, whether they are personal and state secrets, become available to absolutely any person that have certain technical skills?

Yes, there are solutions such as DLP (Data Loss Prevention), a standard that not by chance began to be improved after the LGT scandal (the Liechtenstein Bank). On the other hand, **it is also true that no technology may ever completely stop an information leak**, especially when we are speaking about insiders who have intentionally leaked out such information.

■ *A new elite is emerging in the modern world, which justifies its status by possessing new communication technologies. Does the new 'netocracy' change the nature of elites and their configuration?*

I guess the answer to that question is yes. Let me give you a very simple example. Until several years ago, computer geeks were named 'nerds'. Today they are named geeks, hackers, and so on. This is happening because the world's concept of 'power' has changed. **Today, the power is represented in terms of information:** information is essentially power. Ultimately, geeks know how to gain access to and manipulate information. Then, the network itself – the Internet – as well as social groups and so on, has made things different. Today, for instance, I have noticed that many girls are now being attracted by hackers, who were nerds not so long ago, because the balance and all our views have changed. Also, the fact is that hacking used on the wrong side, meaning cybercrime, brings money. There already exist economic elites, who have made their money based on cybercrime. Thus, the standard and 'old-school' status are changing as well, bringing to light such profiles and backgrounds that were not there just a few years ago.

■ *New communication technologies bring forth two opposite processes: on the one hand, new technologies contribute to a better informational openness and they can serve as the means for emancipating masses. On the other hand, it is a wonderful tool for manipulating the masses and democratic procedures. In your opinion, which of these two processes prevails nowadays?*

In my opinion, the first tendency is dominating. But, the risk that all of this technology may set the stage for mass manipulation is also high: that is another reason why I am 'pro-Assange'. Governments have manipulated information for centuries, haven't they? Then, Gutenberg invented the concept of the 'free press', removing that special power from a restricted elite and effectively bringing culture to the masses. Culture has allowed those masses to evolve, to grow up, and to enhance their background and their lives. **Wikileaks is the 21st century's Gutenberg revolution.** In any case, that is what I hope. ■

Raoul Chiesa was speaking with Yulia Netesova

CYBER CRIMINALS



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It is clearly a crime under US law to divulge classified information. Thus, certainly anyone serving in the US government who has participated in leaking such information should be persecuted. Now, whether or not someone like Julian Assange or Wikileaks falls within the US jurisdiction, I think that is something that needs to be studied and I think that it is being studied. However, I have no doubts that this entails criminal activity.

It is very detrimental to the conduct of US diplomacy, and it would be detrimental to the conduct of the diplomacy of any country that has had its diplomatic and military communications made public. If Wikileaks is not subject to legal proceeding against it, **it will appear that they are operating with impunity, and there will be risk of other leakers also trying to make public the state secrets that are known to them.**

The founders of Wikileaks, as well as the people funding and supporting it, have been profoundly anti-American. The US has been the target of all of the documents disclosed thus far, and I think it is entirely consistent with what we

know about the people who have been involved in Wikileaks. Therefore, I see this as basically an anti-American enterprise.

I think that the consequence will be that foreign government officials, opposition party leaders, dissidents in authoritarian societies, as well as church, religious, civic, business leaders, will now be reluctant to talk to US diplomats due to the fact that they will want their confidential communications to be held in confidence. Of course, they don't want to read about them in the newspapers. The consequence will be that **US diplomats working abroad will be able to learn or obtain less valuable and truthful information.** I think that this situation may be corrected over time but I think that, in the short term, and maybe even in the medium term, it will make interlocutors with US diplomats much more likely to follow only their approved talking point for fear that the State Department cannot ensure that conversations that are intended to be private and in confidence will remain that way - that is, that they are kept private and confidential. ■