

TIME TO REEVALUATE THE IMPORTANCE OF BRADLEY MANNING'S ALLEGED LEAK?

Back when WikiLeaks leaked the Collateral Murder video, I was agnostic about the value of the leak. Surely, exposing the cover-up of the killing of the Reuters journalists was important. But I thought the response focused too much on the soldiers who had been trained to respond the way they had, and too little on the architects of the policies that put them in that dehumanizing position.

I personally didn't delve much into the Afghan cable dump, so I never really assessed its value. And with the sole exception of the Iran hiker cable—which the NYT left dangerously unredacted to make one of its pet points—I found the Iraq cables to be redacted beyond the point of usefulness.

And so it was that in the early days after the State cable release when Joe Lieberman was intervening to try to prevent publication of WikiLeaks, Joe Biden was calling Julian Assange a high tech terrorist, and Sarah Palin was advocating hunting down WikiLeaks like al Qaeda, I was somewhat agnostic on the value of the massive leaks WikiLeaks released. When Floyd Abrams was trying to distinguish “good” leaker Daniel Ellsberg from “bad” alleged leaker Bradley Manning, I knew there had been revelations important to my issues, but I wasn't sure how Manning's alleged leak would measure up across time.

That seems like a long, long time ago.

And while we don't yet know how the State Department cable leaks will weather history, the importance of the leak now seems beyond question. Consider the way the NYT—the Administration's mole in the press

corps—continues to rely on the cable leaks even while it disdains Julian Assange as a bag lady. Indeed, on some stories the NYT is getting scooped on by their former reporters, they use cables as a crutch to catch up.

The NYT is not alone; it seems news outlets around the world have grown accustomed—and downright happy—that these sources are all out there to help them do their jobs.

And consider the range of stories we've seen. We've seen American pressure on allies to put counterterrorism policies—both data collection and torture—ahead of democracy. We've seen how our troops in Iraq knowingly turned over Iraqis to be tortured. We've seen our allies in the Middle East promising to cause democratic elections not to take place. And while I definitely don't think WikiLeaks "caused" the Middle Eastern uprising, they did make it hard for Western elites to defend their former client dictators once the uprisings started.

Over time, I think one of the most damning lessons from the State cables will be evidence of the tolerance for bribery and looting that rots our foreign policy. Thus far, we've seen details of our allies' oil bribery, our disinterest in doing anything about Hosni Mubarak's or Muammar Qaddafi's or the Saudis' looting, We've also seen how our government apparently threw its investigation of rich tax cheats to get Switzerland to take three of our Gitmo detainees. Our government complains about the corruption of other countries. But as WikiLeaks makes clear, those complaints are mostly just for public show.

Our government may hate all these disclosures. But they are disclosures we, as citizens, need to demand our government deliver on its promise of democracy.

After all this time, it seems, El Pais editor Javier Moreno seems to have had the right read on these leaks.

A democracy comprises diverse elements: institutions and rules; free and fair elections; independent judges and a free press, among others. At the bottom of all this there are legal procedures. When these are flouted, all the rest is put at risk.

We have come to accept the difference between the government that we elect every five years, and the military, bureaucratic, and diplomatic apparatus that it is sustained by, but that all too often it fails to control. The WikiLeaks cables have confirmed this beyond any doubt.

Ellsberg's leak of the Pentagon Papers proved our government systematically lied about the war in Vietnam. The WikiLeaks dumps have proved that our government systematically lies about democracy.