

SO, AMAZON, VISA, PAYPAL, WAS IT WORTH ACCEPTING GOVERNMENT LIES?

Mark Hosenball reports that aside from some pockets of short-term damage, the impact of the Wikileaks leak of diplomatic cables has been embarrassing, but not damaging.

Internal U.S. government reviews have determined that a mass leak of diplomatic cables caused only limited damage to U.S. interests abroad, despite the Obama administration's public statements to the contrary.

A congressional official briefed on the reviews said the administration felt compelled to say publicly that the revelations had seriously damaged American interests in order to bolster legal efforts to shut down the WikiLeaks website and bring charges against the leakers.

"I think they just want to present the toughest front they can muster," the official said.

But State Department officials have privately told Congress they expect overall damage to U.S. foreign policy to be containable, said the official, one of two congressional aides familiar with the briefings who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity.

"We were told (the impact of WikiLeaks revelations) was embarrassing but not damaging," said the official, who attended a briefing given in late 2010 by State Department officials.

[snip]

National security officials familiar with the damage assessments being conducted by defense and intelligence agencies told Reuters the reviews so far have shown “pockets” of short-term damage, some of it potentially harmful. Long-term damage to U.S. intelligence and defense operations, however, is unlikely to be serious, they said. [my emphasis]

More important than yet another indication that the Obama Administration has oversold the damage done by Wikileaks is the reason given by Hosenball’s Congressional source as to why they oversold that damage: to bolster legal efforts to shut down Wikileaks’ website.

The Administration lied, says a congressional official, to make it easier to shut down Wikileaks.

Now that’s important for several reasons. First, all this time the government has been pretending that the series of decisions by private corporations to stop doing business with Wikileaks were made by the businesses on their own. Surprise surprise (not!), it seems that the government was affirmatively trying to shut down Wikileaks.

Just as importantly, Hosenball’s story seems to suggest, the government was going to service providers—the same service providers they routinely go to on terrorist investigations—and lying to get them to do the government’s bidding. The government was making claims about the damage of the leak to convince service providers to shut down Wikileaks.

And companies like Amazon, Visa, and PayPal complied.

So, to these companies, now tainted with cooperation in government censorship, was it worth it? Was it worth being branded as a collaborator, knowing you were lied to?

And to Philip Crowley, whom Hosenball quotes talking about “substantial” damage: given your critique of Tunisia’s suppression of social media, and given that we now know you lied in the service of similar repression, do you still want to claim there’s no disjunct between claiming to support free speech while squelching that of Wikileaks?