

The Perils of Self-Censorship in Academic Research in a Wikileaks World

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Abstract: For the past six years, the availability of Wikileaks data -including the SIGACTS violent event data for Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the diplomatic cables – has posed an important challenge for international relations and conflict researchers. Despite the evident attractions of the vast trove of primary data involving US military and diplomatic interests, only a few peer-reviewed academic papers have been published. The reluctance to analyze Wikileaked information is mostly due to self-censorship. Because of its character, we cannot reliably know why American academics engage in self-censoring but worries about repercussions for career prospects or of prosecution are probable. Despite threats by governmental officials about legal consequences, none have occurred (to my knowledge). Academics who have publicly spurned analysis of Wikileaks information have made two arguments, either a) that is again US law to access the data and/or that it helps America's enemies or b) that the materials in the leaks are not worthy of much attention since they are not earth-shattering or unexpected. Neither of these claims holds much validity.

Most of the heated discussion about the leaks of government documents, through the Wikileaks site (www.wikileaks.org) since 2009 and the disclosures of the secret activities of the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) via Edward Snowden in 2013, has focused on the motivations of the leakers and the threats to government security in the ongoing "war on terrorism". With bipolar views of leakers as either patriots or traitors, extensive debate continues about whether Wikileaks is a new kind of journalism that merits 1st Amendment protection in the absence of a test of legal precedent governing such journalism. This amendment to the US constitution prohibits "the making of any law ... infringing on the freedom of the press". The vast dumps of information (Julian Assange, founder of Wikileaks, claims over 2 billion words alone in the diplomatic cables; 2015 p. 10) are now being gingerly examined by academics long after the initial excitement of journalists has waned (e.g. Pegg and Berg, 2016). The logs of almost a half-million violent events in Afghanistan and Iraq gathered in the field by the US military have to date generated a couple dozen academic papers in peer-reviewed journals. Assange himself (2015) and other commentators (Michael, 2015; Spannos, 2015) have questioned why the research output from such a treasure trove of information has been so meager. The community of scholars who would be expected to harvest these data, especially international relations and conflict researchers, has been relatively silent. The main explanation for this reticence must be self-censorship; to date (mid 2016), no scholar or journalist has been punished for publication using this leaked information.

In this article, I will define self-censorship and using the example of Wikileaks data, I will examine the stop-start discussion about the opportunities and misadventures of their use in contemporary academic research. Because self-censorship by definition is taken on voluntarily and very rarely reported, it's almost impossible to know how pervasive it is. In this regard, I am speculating about self-censorship's far-reaching nature. Only a few scholars have signposted publicly that they will not be using

Wikileaks data in their work. Drew Conway quickly produced dramatic graphics of the war log data from Afghanistan when they first became available. A few months later, he disavowed further analysis of the Wikileaks files because he felt that the Wikileaks organization was cavalier with the anonymity of the individuals' names in the files (Conway, 2010). Multiple reasons can underlie the abjuration of leaked data from secret and classified government files and we can only speculate about the relative importance of individuals' respective motivations. I will argue that, despite perceived menaces to career and threatened legal ramifications, scholars in international relations and conflict studies are doing a disservice to their disciplines by repudiating analyses of the Wikileaks files that contain a treasure trove of information that can inform our research.

The Spiral of Silence

Self-censorship is the most insidious kind of censorship and furthermore, it is the most effective type. As argued by Michael Kinsley (2016, p. 74), it has the advantage that "it leaves no footprints." We can generally acquire some sense of state censorship of media and individuals but we have no estimate of how many individuals considered examining leaked data and quietly abandoned their projects.

Self-censorship can be simply defined as a self-imposed silence without being told formally or officially that such silence is mandated. Absent overt pressure from authorities, authors might self-censor because of fear of self-incrimination or because they agree with the official positions of state authorities. It can also be due to worries about being ostracized by one's community or to fear of loss of status. Such fears are well documented for news outlets, mass entertainment (Hollywood), and most recently, in social media. Though no comprehensive survey has been completed, informal conversations with Henry Farrell, one of the editors of the Monkey Cage blog at the Washington Post, revealed "other prominent academic publishers are extremely nervous about publishing material that explicitly draws on WikiLeaks. It's not that they want to please the U.S. government; they are worried about the threat of legal action." (Michael 2015).

The self-censorship of journalists and academics reflects broader societal trends in the US and elsewhere. Given the rapid dissemination of opinions via social media, individuals are increasingly cautious of sharing opinions for fear of offending others, of expressing controversial opinions, of legal repercussions, or of social reprobation. A recent report by the Pew foundation based on a large public opinion survey on and about the Snowden revelations showed that a "spiral of silence" is taking hold in the US (Hamilton et al, 2014). The authors highlight "the degree to which social media affects a long-established human attribute—that those who think they hold minority opinions often self-censor, failing to speak out for fear of ostracism or ridicule", and thus, reinforcing the spiral of silence. A person is generally more willing to share such opinions with close friends, family or colleagues but in an environment of fear of reprisal, voicing them publicly can have adverse consequences. In Russia too, this phenomenon is becoming more common as pollsters note that the public is now more likely to veer away from controversial answers and to agree with the view that most fellow citizens think similarly (Levada Center, 2016).

Almost 30 years ago, Herman and Chomsky (1988) in *Manufacturing Consent* identified how the mass media in the US effectively props up the economic-political system by engaging in self-censorship, particularly by avoiding and castigating alternative views. This practice is motivated by mass media reliance on market forces (advertising) and does not need the kinds of state control and interference that is now characteristic of authoritarian regimes. This behavior is certainly understandable in an advertising-driven environment; what is different 30 years later is the ready accessibility of alternative and foreign views via social media, blogs, email, list-servs and other offspring of the internet revolution. Most people, however, still get their news from the major corporative sources in the US (55% from television and another 9% from newspapers) and from state-controlled media in other countries (85% in Russia say that television is their main news source). We tend to live in a "filter bubble", accessing only media that align with already-formed

opinions. The end result of these developments for most people is a limited and self-limiting exposure to alternative views.

Scholars generally don't have the same funding pressures as journalists, though in many countries they are expected to conform to state-imposed limitations and storylines about politically-sensitive topics. Glorious opposition to state sanctions does not mark the history of some disciplines. Geography, my own discipline, was singled out by the Nazi regime for special attention as many of the emphases of the discipline of the day (such as Lebensraum and environmental determinism) underpinned Hitlerite philosophies and ambitions (Giaccaria and Minca, 2016; Snyder, 2015). German academic journals saw extensive censorship after the Nazi takeover of power in 1933. Editors also engaged in self-censorship in order to remain on the right side of the regime that even closed down a previously-lauded publication, *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik (ZfG)*, in the early 1940s after it strayed from the party line. Sandner (1983), using the ZfG archives, documents the pernicious effects of the self-censorship of articles as well as the mal-treatment of Jewish authors.

One tends to think of self-censorship as motivated only by fear. Fear of prosecution from over-zealous governments determined to keep their secrets, fear of loss of employment from government-funded institutions, fear of distain from colleagues or diminution of status in current place of employment, fear of threats to research funding from government foundations, or even fear of damage to one's reputation from galvanized opponents in the public forum can all contribute to a spiral of silence. But it might well be that self-censorship is more motivated by approval of government decisions that classify information of potential value to the academic community. Such a case is made by Assange (2015) who accuses the US-dominated international relations community of collusion with, and benefitting from close association with, government agencies. (I think that this is an exaggeration since these organizations are very diverse in ideological orientations.) Whatever the individual reasons, the silence, while not quite deafening, is certainly striking.

The Wikileaks Data - War Logs and Diplomatic Cables

Numerous books by journalists who were associated with the Wikileaks releases have documented the procedures that allowed major newspapers (*Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*) access to the files before the simultaneously timed stories that appeared in late July 2010 on the Afghanistan war logs (SIGACTS data).

Originally composed of over 91,000 events - each a row in a large data base - 14000 events were redacted to protect the identity of Afghans cooperating on counter-insurgency actions. The events covered 6 years (2004-2009) and document each action by time, precise location, casualties and a short description. Journalists familiar with the happenings and the locations certified the accuracy of the files (Keller and Star, 2011; Beckett and Ball, 2012; Leigh and Harding, 2011). Initial fears that individuals cooperating with foreign forces, whose names remained in the files, would be targeted were misplaced (Keller, 2011, 19).

A further more massive release in late October 2010 of 391,000 SIGACTS followed the same procedure (partnering with major outlets) that Assange saw as lending credibility to the information and providing some 1st amendment protection from over-zealous US attorneys. As Bill Keller, then *The New York Times* editor indicates, this was a successful strategy for the papers, though not for Wikileaks activists. "In our discussions before the publications of our articles, White House officials, while challenging some of the conclusions we drew from the material, thanked us for handling the documents with care.... There has been no serious official talk ... of pursuing news organizations in the courts" (Keller, 2011, 15). While the Obama administration has left the newspapers alone, it has vigorously pursued the leakers of official secret documents. Like other agencies, the State Department errs on the side of "over-classification". Successful in the courts with arguments that government employees have violated the oath of secrecy and winning lengthy jail terms for whistle-blowers, the administration has seemingly distinguished between the providers of secret classified information on the one hand and the users of the

information (journalists, scholars, bloggers, etc.) on the other. While embarrassed by some of the juicy details contained in the millions of US diplomatic cables released in December 2010, the Obama administration seems to be adhering to a line highlighted by Keller (2011, 20-21) that "criminalizing the publication of such secrets by someone who has no official obligation seems to me to run up against the First Amendment and the best traditions of this country." Stopped at US borders where the 4th Amendment against arbitrary search-and-seizure does not apply Wikileaks activists have had their computers seized and contents searched while the accounts of others on Gmail, Twitter and other sites have been searched under secret court orders (Domscheit -Berg 2011).

Unlike the journalists who first plumbed the Wikileaks diplomatic cables and focused on individual or connected events associated with one story, like the exposure of the corruption of Tunisian officials that kick-started the "Arab Spring", scholarly work on the Afghanistan and Iraq war logs has generally scrutinized the files as a whole, trying to make sense of the ebb and flow of violence while testing theories of conflict dynamics.¹ Examples are the papers by Schutte (2015, 2016), De Deo et al (2013) and Rusch et al (2013). By contrast, the cables have been used predominantly in studies of local politics, both of the domestic kind but also of foreign relations with neighboring countries and with the United States. Examples are the papers by Lefebvre (2012) Dodds (2012), and Pegg and Berg (2015).

My own experience with the Wikileaks files date from the very first days of the Afghan war logs release. My colleagues, Andrew Linke and Frank Witmer, and I had just finished a paper on violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan using reported events in the ACLED data base.² When I saw the first Guardian story on the Aghanistan war logs, I immediately recognized the potential for checking the accuracy of the ACLED

¹ Some authors use Wikileaks stories or journalist stories about the Wikileaks data in a kind of 'third party' sourcing that dodges responsibility for accessing the raw materials.

² The views in this paper are my own and are not necessarily shared by the co-authors Witmer, Thorwardson and Linke who cooperated with me on the Wikileaks data articles.

data by comparing them to the SIGACTS data. The two files line up very well in their spatial distribution by province and also in their temporal trends (O'Loughlin et al, 2010). Adopting a cartographical approach combined with spatial analytics, we showed the ebb-and-flow of the war across Afghanistan over the 2004-2009 period for which the Wikileaks war logs were available. Our paper appeared online within one month of the war logs release and the link was quickly tweeted by Assange (2 September 2010). We followed up with a second paper in 2012 using the Iraq Wikileaks data to examine the tit-for-tat behavior of insurgents and coalition forces across the country and within Baghdad (Linke et al, 2012). By this time, a trickle of other academic papers was beginning to surface in the journals.

Our Afghanistan paper was certainly the first academic paper that was published using the leaked information. It was written in a time of some uncertainty about the legality of the use of the data. While the Pentagon Papers case in the Supreme Court case of 1971 had certified the right of the newspapers to publish secret documents given to them by a whistle-blower, it was (still is) not certain that the 1st Amendment protections of a free press extends to academics. (The Pentagon papers were classified "top secret" while the war logs are classified as "secret"). My amateurish attempts in 2010 to check the legal basis for publishing an academic work like our Afghanistan paper seemed to indicate that, since the material was already in the public domain, it could be analyzed and that the resultant publication was protected by the free speech clause. We did not further disseminate the data by posting it on a web site even as a replication file but our work can be replicated if the would-be replicator get his/her own Wikileaks data and match, using our instructions, to our parsed files using the event code. (We dropped some SIGACT events as they are not acts of violence). A similar approach of providing code, but not the original data, was also followed by Gill and Spirling (2015).

The reaction to our publications was generally supportive. The publisher of our first paper, owner of a small academic press, did query whether I wished to risk any negative reaction from the government, especially regarding future research funding. (I have received 8 grants from the US National Science Foundation since

this paper emerged so there are no evident repercussions on that front). As a publisher, he was convinced he was protected in the same way as the *New York Times* and was willing to go to court, if necessary, to certify that principle. I declined the approximately dozen media requests (they had seen the Assange tweet) since they were more interested in my opinions on the ongoing Afghan war and Assange's legal troubles than on the content of the paper. From academics, the few dozen emails I got were laudatory but some, especially from political scientists, expressed surprise that there had been no negative responses to the publications from government officials. A few young scholars asked for advice about approaching the data for their own use and were worried about career prospects. This worry seemed to emanate from a disciplinary skepticism about both the high value of the Wikileaks data and a concern, bolstered by the comments of government officials, that the data were tainted. A typical comment was that "as a graduate student, I would like to use the data but my career prospects would be damaged, maybe even destroyed, if I published on them."

The Wikileaked SIGACTS data for Afghanistan and Iraq have been made available through a different route, via military releases to select academics who (presumably) have security or vetted clearances to use them. Shapiro and his colleagues have published numerous papers with Iraq data given to them and supported by "the Office of Homeland Security and the DOD Minerva initiative through the Air Force Office of Scientific Research." (Berman, Shapiro and Felter, 2011). The same data were used by Weidmann and Salehyan, 2013) in their publications. Further, a separate file on IED attacks in Iraq has been analyzed for the six month period in early 2005 by Braithwaite and Johnson (2012, 2015) with the data obtained from a government contractor and seemingly declassified for this release (personal communication with A. Braithwaite, 4 March 2016). Does it matter in any fundamental way how the data were obtained by outsiders, either through the route of leaking or a route of favoritism and/or an expectation of a payoff through a remunerated report for the military?

Unlike the Wikileaks data, it does not appear that the Shapiro et al files have been deposited or made available for replication in the wider academic. Scholarly practice increasingly encourages data sharing. I have already criticized a scholar who published in a similar manner in an academic journal after he consulted for the military on the search for Osama bin Laden in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan. He stated that he could not share his data or methods because they were (self) classified (O'Loughlin, 2005; Beck, 2003, 2005).

The double-standard evident in such academic works parallels the double standard of leaking in the political world. While administration officials strongly criticize Assange and his colleagues for leaking classified information, they themselves have selectively leaked similar data for political gain or to spin a particular story. Top officials routinely offer classified information to journalists, especially insiders like Bob Woodward, to push a policy or justify a decision, usually a military action. "I have a hard time squaring the anger the government is directing toward Wikileaks with its top officials openly violating classification rules and opportunistically revealing without authorization top secret information" (Jack Goldsmith, former assistant attorney general in the Bush administration, quoted in Sifry, 2011, 188). Such leaks are not punished while whistle-blowers who are found guilty in the courts of distributing state secrets to journalists are sentenced to lengthy jail terms. Others like Edward Snowden are subject to the terms of the Espionage Act of 1917 that allows such leakers to be charged as traitors with potentially severe consequences.

Does Fear Drive Academic Self-censorship?

Various estimates have put the number of individuals who had access to the SIGACTS data in the order of 400,000-500,000 persons. This is just a minority of the almost 2 million people who have security clearances in the US, a vast army of consultants, government employees, retirees, workers in various military and intelligence agencies, and contractors (Priest and Arkin, 2011). Relatively little of

what goes on behind the "security fence" emerges into the public arena despite the possibilities for whistle-blowing and leaking. When it does, as with the SIGACTS data, we see outraged and threatening statements from administration officials, both Republican and Democrat, and elected representatives. In the wake of the Wikileaks releases, Vice-President Joe Biden referred to Assange as a "high tech terrorist", a particularly damning moniker in the tense environment of the US "war on terror". Senator Joe Lieberman, chair of the Homeland Security committee, pressured US companies such as Amazon, MasterCard and PayPal to stop hosting accounts and processing payments for Wikileaks. Lieberman called for the Justice Department to investigate whether the *New York Times* could be prosecuted. He later introduced the so-called SHIELD (Securing Human Intelligence and Enforcing Lawful Dissemination) act to the Senate which would amend the 1917 Espionage act making it a crime to publish information "'concerning the identity of a classified source or informant of an element of the intelligence community of the United State', if such publication is prejudicial to U.S. interests." (Poulsen, 2010). The bill never became law.

What probably caused more ripples in the academic community was the 2010 directive from the Obama administration that government employees with specific security clearance to the SIGACTS materials should not access the Wikileaks site, even on private computers, and should not read newspaper accounts about the leaked data. Such a prohibition was clearly unenforceable in an online world of multiple media sources but it sent a shock wave through the scholarly community. The news that the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs had issued a guideline to their students to boycott the Wikileaks sites and associated newspaper stories since students accessing them would not be able to pass the security checks for government service added to the worries. This was soon clarified and reversed on free speech grounds and the State Department, supposedly the original bearer of the message, disavowed any formal policy on the matter (Costin 2010; Stone 2011). Anyone with ambitions of a career in diplomatic services or any other federal government employment that required a security clearance

received an unmistakable signal from the Obama administration. Though the number is unknown, members of the ISA and similar organizations have been influenced by the government directives. Assange (2015) believes that this apprehension is the one of the main reasons why the released data have not been extensively studied.

Congressional hearings on the Wikileaks affair in December 2010 revealed a clear partisan split between Democrats who generally took a free speech position bolstered by the testimony of seven legal scholars on press freedom and 1st Amendment rights, and Republicans who believed that the site should be shut down, its operators prosecuted and its materials banned from publications (Blanton, 2010). Though not established by a Supreme Court case, the legal experts cast strong doubts that the 1917 Espionage Act would prevail in any Wikileaks legal case.

The initial hysteria in late 2010 about Wikileaks was later dampened by statements from Obama government officials that the leaks had caused no obvious damages to key US interests and that the publications that used Wikileaks materials would not be investigated or prosecuted (Hosenball 2011). Michael (2015b, 182) quotes the Congressional Research Service (Elsea, 2013) as stating that it was "aware of no case in which a publisher of information obtained through unauthorized disclosure by a government employee has been prosecuted for publishing it." The same report emphasizes that while leaked information related to national defense may be covered by the 1917 Espionage Act, "There appears to be no statute that generally proscribes the acquisition or publication of diplomatic cables, although government employees who disclose such information without proper authority may be subject to prosecution."

One would have thought that these elaborations of the legal consequences would have assuaged any fears about studying Wikileaks materials, but apparently not. As well as the initial formal pressures, a subtle, unspoken but effective climate of resigned acceptance and assent became the creed of the IR and foreign policy communities in the US. Faculty advised students to consider their career prospects

and one journal editor (Dan Nexon) complained about being in an untenable position, between the grey legalities of publishing works based on stolen classified data and the disciplinary interests of enlarging the corpus of scholarly research (Michael 2015b).³

Without announced formal policies about accepting papers for review that contain Wikileaks materials, second-hand information about informal or even idiosyncratic editorial decisions becomes the norm. Not even the journals of the same organization are consistent. An ISA journal, *International Studies Perspectives*, published a paper using the Wikileaks cables to study the local politics of 'de facto' states (Pegg and Berg, 2015). This and the other handful of journals that published articles using Wikileaks materials are clearly not self-censoring but we don't know how many others are and if they are, how they enforce it (for example, by desk rejecting papers without review). One option to mitigate editorial worries is to have the paper vetted for any apparent or suspected legal violations by institutional lawyers, as was completed by Harvard University for the authors of the article that estimated the size of the initial WikiCable leaks. An acknowledgement reads: "The authors are grateful to the Office of the General Counsel at Harvard University for legal advice." (Gill and Spirling, 2015, 299).

Dan Drezner (2010) and other commentators (Norton, 2015, Spannos 2015) have appraised the claim by Julian Assange that users of the Wikileaks materials will be "blackballed", ostracized from the community of international relations scholars or pressured in their careers. No clear evidence of this threat has yet emerged though a couple of anecdotal experiences are cited. My own assessment is that the fear factor becomes exaggerated in the absence of reliable evidence one way or the other. This is why self-censorship is so effective; few are willing to brave any consequences for taking the first or the second steps.

³ Dan Nexon, editor of *International Studies Quarterly*, discussed this dilemma in the panel on academic freedom and censorship at the 2016 Atlanta conference of the International Studies Association.

Does Indifference Explain the Self-Censorship in Light of Contrary Evidence?

It is likely that a significant number of potential analysts of Wikileaks material shun its use because they believe that state secret materials should remain classified, away from the purview of the public. They also believe that if such material makes its way into the public domain, the only effective way to diminish its impact is to ignore it. In academic circles, such disdain can take the form of a refusal to cite works that use Wikileaks materials, which might be one reason why Drezner sees few citations of such articles. Short of a reliable survey of ISA membership, for example, it's impossible to know how widespread this view is held. As Spannos (2015) notes, while there is no direct pipeline from the graduate training programs in international studies in the US to government service, many graduates do follow this career path. More broadly, however, he writes "there is an institutional context and culture within universities where academics naturally look for opportunities, either for funding or jobs, that shape their intellectual values and framework. This context includes an already existing 'old-boys network' that defines the parameters of acceptable thinking and research."

Equally puzzling is the belief that the international studies community is indifferent to the Wikileaks materials, specifically the SIGACTS data and the cables, because they contain nothing new and are simply the mundane daily actions of the military and the diplomatic corps. Drezner (2015) claims that "A quick scan of Google Scholar keywords suggest that it's not just ISA journals that are not exploiting WikiLeaks' diplomatic archive. Pretty much the entire global academy is not citing WikiLeaks all that much. Even when they are, the citation count suggests that not many people are reading such articles." This claim can be debunked through a more careful study of the citation counts for individual articles. Our 2010 Afghanistan paper, for example, has 62 citations (February 2016), about half specifically for the study of war dynamics and the rest as an example of the value of Wikileaks data. Other articles using the Afghan data have received more public attention than a typical political science paper. An example is the Zammit-Mangion et al (2012)

paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, a prominent general science journal, that has been the basis for news stories and public discussion about the Afghan war's dynamics (Ehrenberg, 2012).

A good illustration of the value of the Wikileaks disclosures is the comparison of the information contained therein with other sources. Weidmann (2015) checks the events reported in the media, collated in the widely used ACLED database, against the SIGACTS war logs and detects important structural biases in the media information. Identifying and measuring such biases is critical for the conflict studies community since geolocated and time-stamped event data have been used in hundreds of published papers over the past 15-20 years. The level of casualties in Iraq's complicated conflicts during the period covered by the leaks, 2004-2009, was significantly higher than estimates from media reports. Only 46% of the SIGACT deaths had been reported in the most comprehensive effort on casualties estimation (Carpenter et al, 2013). For both academic reasons and for government honesty with the public about the scale of violence in an ongoing war, these comparisons are certainly noteworthy and cannot be dismissed as insignificant.

The cables especially lend themselves to understanding the nature of US policy towards various states. A text analysis illustrates the nature of secrecy, both substantive and procedural, in American (Gill and Spirling, 2016). Many more articles and now books have been published using the diplomatic cables as primary material and while some commentators (e.g. Michael, 2015a) have made the point that there contain few earth-shattering details, close examination of the texts, without waiting for the usual embargo period of decades, can identify important near-contemporary developments. Evidence of corruption amongst Tunisian government officials helped kick start the Arab Spring protests in that country (Dickinson, 2011; White, 2011) while the cables from 2009 from Syria clearly indicate the devastating drought in the north and east of the country and the feeble efforts of the Assad regime to cope with food shortages and migration to urban areas (Friedman, 2014). The cables also indicate that the Bush administration relied heavily on the self-serving accounts of the Georgia government of Mikheil

Saakashvili as it prepared an attack on its breakaway region of South Ossetia that eventually resulted in the 2008 Russian-Georgian 5 day war. As well as these dramatic examples, Michael (2015b) shows the value of the cables in understanding cases where the "dog did not bark".

The sheer volume of the Wikileaks files, both the war logs and the cables, suggests opportunities for further research. The slow appearance of academic publications can be partly attributed to the time required to slog through the mind-numbing details of the texts, as Michael (2015b) explains. Even a limited search by time or country requires herculean reading, though text processing software can certainly speed the process significantly. More generally, as Gill and Spirling (2016) show, broad-spectrum trends and general themes can be discerned. Newspapers continue to crank out stories based on new Wikileaks information, most recently of internal Saudi Arabian files, and the revelations have proved a boon to advocates of more openness in closed societies. Academic work has a long way to go to catch up to these media

Why Self-Censorship is Perilous for Scholarly Work

Academic freedom (the right to engage in research of the scholar's preference without state interference) and freedom of speech are the twin pillars of contemporary scholarship in the United States. Academic freedom extends beyond free speech protection since it represents an implied guarantee by the employing institution that the choice and mode of inquiry is the scholar's alone. Abrogating that right by self-censorship is a giant step backwards from the hard-fought gains of the past 75 years in American academia. Though the ramped-up government rhetoric since September 11th 2001 has tried to portray the "war on terror" as an either-or choice, scholars should reject the principle promoted by the Bush and Obama administrations that investigation of military and diplomatic state actions described in leaked secret files should not be sanctioned.

If the climate of (self-induced) fear and the spiral of silence that is now widespread

in the international studies community in the United States is allowed to go unnoticed and unchallenged, a kind of “learned helplessness” will become endemic. As a privileged class in society, academics have the resources, ability and duty to resist the pervasive powerlessness that many sense in these times. Senior scholars need to take the lead since they have both the sway of eminence and the protection of tenure. Lawyers at academic institutions will typically err on the side of caution and advise restraint in using leaked data which, of course, only certifies and fossilizes self-censorship. The episode reported by Lightener (2006) where a professional organization censored an editorial that named Bush administration officials (it was not libelous in any way) indicates the overreach of legal advice.

The positions of academic societies in the (self)suppressed debate about the Wikileaks materials are not yet evident. Because editors and authors of society journals are working in a murky environment with no clear guidelines on what is and is not permissible, the default action is to assume that examination of the material carries some career-damaging consequences or worse. The ISA has recently (January 2016) condemned the abridgement of academic freedom and free speech in Turkey but its statement about the examination of classified records now in the public domain in the US takes no position on this matter (www.isanet.org/Publications/Classified-Materials/mid/10601?popUp=true). Rather than a trial of a submission-and-desk rejection process for authors who publish on the Wikileaks papers in order to find an apposite outlet, it would be preferable if the association made a clarifying statement about the openness of its journals to them. Better yet would be a broader encompassing statement with other social science consortia in the United States since authors in non-political science disciplines have also scrutinized the Wikileaks files.

The lack of any visible precedent for academic freedom in this contemporary case will allow the spiral of silence to be maintained in future circumstances. It matters if only a few more authors are effectively censored when their papers are returned

without review due to the provenance of the data in the Wikileaks archives⁴ or even if only a few dozen others self-censor due to trepidations about careers or legal ramifications. It is highly likely that further leaks of classified materials will enter the public arena. Relative to scholars in most parts of the world, American researchers operate in a relatively open society and, as the success of the Monkey Cage blog at the *Washington Post* shows (Kafka, 2016), they can influence a public audience and elected officials. It would be an ethical and professional abrogation of our academic privileges and public standing to continue to discount the information in the Wikileaks files and to continue to self-censor them as we have done to date.

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⁴ I know of four papers that have been returned to the authors by editors on the grounds that their hands are tied and that they have been advised by institutional lawyers to reject papers based on Wikileaks materials without review.

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