WikiLeaks and Realpolitik

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Abstract

WikiLeaks—an online whistle-blowing organization based in Sweden—released documents from U.S. foreign diplomats, termed "the diplomatic cables," on November 28, 2010. Upon their release, politicians from both sides of the U.S. political spectrum condemned the organization. This analysis demonstrates that the censure was not a result of unmanageable harm to U.S. foreign relations but because WikiLeaks violated the United States state secret privilege. Through an inductive approach, a realpolitik perspective is adopted to make sense of the aftermath of the release. Realpolitik is governance based on national interests which drives the decisions of the United State government. State secrets, while certainly having legitimate uses, are used to cover up state crimes and misdeeds. They are kept because the government seeks to control its image and any information that can harm it. Politicians and government leaders respond in a manner meant to neutralize threats to the state's image and control of information. This analysis demonstrates how realpolitik is at work through the responding political rhetoric to WikiLeaks release of the diplomatic cables through an examination of the use of arbitrary rhetoric—vague and open statements made by officials that leave room for interpretation favorable to the state—and the labeling of WikiLeaks as a criminal organization.

WikiLeaks and Realpolitik

WikiLeaks has teased the genie of transparency out of a very opaque bottle, and powerful forces in America, who thrive on secrecy, are trying desperately to stuff the genie back in.

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson[1]

INTRODUCTION

As the year 2010 came to a close, one topic flickered across news sources throughout the United States and the world—WikiLeaks. In particular, scrutiny was drawn to the whistle-blower organization because of the attention it garnered following the release of secret U.S. documents (emails from U.S. foreign diplomats) dubbed the "diplomatic cables." The political reaction was predominantly bipartisan and unified during this period with politicians from both sides of the U.S. political spectrum denouncing the release of the documents and condemning the organization. This analysis focuses on the relationship between the release of the secret U.S. documents and the political reactions that followed.

WikiLeaks is an Internet-based whistle-blower organization currently operated out of Sweden and founded by an Australian, Julian Assange. Notoriety for the organization was first achieved following the release of a classified video in 2009 which WikiLeaks entitled "Collateral Murder." This video featured a U.S. attack helicopter mistaking unarmed civilians (two of whom were reporters) as armed insurgents (Leigh & Harding, 2011). The civilians were gunned down along with another civilian to another who stopped to help the wounded. Two children were also hurt in the gunfire. This video throttled WikiLeaks into the international spotlight.

One of the reasons for WikiLeaks' international media status during this period was public officials' reactions to the organization. Following the release of the diplomatic cables, U.S. political officials claimed the leaks would hurt U.S. foreign policy despite an assessment by the Obama Administration that the damage would be "containable" (Hosenball, 2011).

Officials also called for measures to be taken against WikiLeaks that included labeling the organization as terrorist, prosecuting Julian Assange under the Espionage Act of 1917, and even calls for the execution of suspected leakers ("Biden Slams," 2010; Kohn, 2010; Leigh & Harding, 2011; Poulsen, 2010; Rubin, 2010a; Rubin, 2010b). These reactions reveal a government primarily concerned with preserving the image of the United States and maintaining its power. In other words, it indicates a government run on *realpolitik*.

This analysis will demonstrate a link between state secrecy, state crime, and realpolitik using evidence provided by the controversy surrounding WikiLeaks and the release of the diplomatic cables. A review of realpolitik is provided accompanied by a brief discussion of the criminology of state crime. At the end of this section is an explanation of relationship between state secrecy and state crime and how the realpolitik perspective can be used as a theoretical guide for understanding it. What follows is a discussion of the results of an inductive analysis of U.S. political officials' reactions (statements and actions) to WikiLeaks and how these reactions are demonstrative of realpolitik. Before proceeding, however, a description of realpolitik is provided as a theoretical perspective for understanding state crime and, most important for this analysis, state secrecy. A brief description of WikiLeaks as an organization will follow.

REALPOLITIK

Realpolitik is "a framework that serves as a guide for policymaking" and "is associated with the school of realism as a political theory of power and neo-realism as an interest-based theory" (Rothe, 2010, p. 113). Simply stated, a realpolitik nation-state makes decisions guided by rational self-interest rather than by morality (Rothe, 2010). Realpolitik, "assumes that everyone is out to maximize their own interest, and that states are out to maximize their interests as well" (Anderson, 2009, p. 3). A nation-state guided by realpolitik tends to focus on the security of its national independence which can be

achieved through measures to attain power such as military, economic, and/or political might (Wayman & Diehl, 1994). The realpolitik mode of governance is a rational-decision based calculus that derives itself from post-Westphalian enlightenment thinking (Maogoto, 2004). This particular conceptualization of realpolitik has been expanded to also consider the different institutions within the nation-state (like the economy, the military, and political institutions) that may have competing interests that are at odds with each other (Rothe, 2010). The realpolitik perspective has been used by scholars to understand or explain foreign policy and international relations in many countries such as China (Christensen, 1996; Xin, 2010), Soviet Russia (Kober, 1990), Indonesia (Balachandran, 2007), and the United States (Kober, 1990).

While realpolitik's origins as a term are attributed to the late 19th century (Rothe, 2010) the underlying philosophy of realism has been traced back to the Greek historian, Thucydides (Wayman & Diehl, 1994). The concept of realpolitik in national governance has further roots dating back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 that occurred following the end of the Thirty Years War fought between the Protestant and Catholic states (Maogoto, 2004; Shearing & Johnston, 2010). This period saw the establishment of the modern nation-state. Borders were fixed and sovereignty was bestowed to the national leaders, who largely had impunity within their borders. As Maogoto (2004) states, "The post-Westphalian era reinforced the government's duty to maximize the assets of their states (through militarism and conquest) without regard to the consequences (real or hypothetical) to society" (p. 2).

While alternatives to realism-based perspectives on governance have existed prior, a shift away from the post-Westphalian realpolitik occurred following World War I and began in earnest after World War II. "It took the senseless mayhem of World War I—the destruction of economic structures, dissipation of financial resources, and undermining of political stability—to erase the traditional notion that war was a rational political act" (Maogoto, 2004, p. 4). The widespread chaos and destruction of the World Wars produced

the idea that bestowing national sovereigns with power unchecked within their borders except by war was not a desirable mode of maintaining peace in a rapidly globalizing world. Realism and realpolitik is underpinned by the work of philosophers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes who advocated an "ends justify the means" approach of the state (Strauss, 1936; Strauss, 1958). In a very strict sense, this tradition emphasizes that the state pursue the goals of national security and stability regardless of the ethical or moral dubiousness of the means because the benefits of a stable and powerful nation were of the upmost importance. Conversely, idealism is influenced by the Kantian philosophical tradition and it emphasizes that the ends do not always justify the means (Wayman & Diehl, 1994). The goals of the state must be attained justly and the preservation of morality and democracy are key concerns of the idealist perspective. Importantly for this analysis, realism holds governments should be secretive and amoral and determined to maintain military security (Wayman & Diehl, 1994). Idealism, however, "believe that governments should be open and honest" (Wayman & Diehl, 1994, p. 14).

Idealism began to interject itself more prominently into international affairs during and after the period of the World Wars (Wayman & Diehl, 1994). Starting with The Nuremburg Trials following World War II, an international penal process was "practically inaugurated" (Maogoto, 2004, p. 5). The establishment of the United Nations and the International Criminal Court occurred during the post-Nuremburg period. These institutions were oriented towards maintaining peace among nations and, most importantly, safeguarding human rights. Ideally international jurisprudence moves away from realpolitik but certainly a nation could participate for its own interests of power. With a body of international law, state sovereigns could be, hypothetically, held accountable for their actions inside and outside their own borders. A transition to a world governed by ethics and responsibility was not complete, however. Still today, a tension is maintained between realpolitik governance and more idealism-based governance.

In a dialectical sense then, a nation-state and its various institutions are capable of exhibiting features of both realpolitik and idealism. Countries can vary on the intensity realpolitik influences their decisions and behaviors. Realpolitik often cannot account for all decision making by a nation-state (Christensen, 1996). It would be appropriate to think of realpolitik and idealism as different points on a balancing scale. Too much of either can lead to negative consequences. A government too guided by realpolitik will sacrifice more moralistic principles of governance which many people value such as the democratic process. A government which is too idealist, however, may sacrifice national security and political stability as a result transparency and democracy because these values allow people to initiate rapid political change (Kober, 1990). Philosophical compromises between idealism and realism exist which may be more beneficial for balanced governance such as *ethical realism* (Carlson, 2008).

Historically there is reason to believe idealism and realism have served as competing philosophies of American foreign policy (Kober, 1990). Under idealism, power arises from the will of well-informed democratic peoples and foreign policy decisions are predicated from this (Kober, 1990). Under realism, power circulates among national leaders. Political stability arises from a balance of powers amongst leadership; powers guided by the interests of the nation-state (Kober, 1990). Evidence currently suggests the United States has become an intensely realpolitik-oriented nation-state during and after the Cold-War period where realpolitik's emphasis on balancing powers was prominent (Kober, 1990). In recent times, scholars have documented how the U.S. bypassed international law and protocol in conducting its affairs such as the War on Terror and the War in Iraq, an act which has been termed "unilateralism" (Alvarez, 2004; Jones, 2004; Weiss, Crahan, & Goering, 2004). Underlying unilateralism is a belief that the United States is somehow exceptional; it alone is exempt from international law (Mertus, 2005). While simultaneously espousing the benefits of international law and cooperation, many of the actions of the U.S.

do not match those ideals such as the unilateral War in Iraq and the detention and subsequent abuse of 'suspected terrorists' in camps like those in Guantanamo Bay and Bagram (Scott, 2004; Weiss, Crahan, & Goering, 2004; Sands, 2008). Realpolitik governance—like that exhibited by the U.S.—can generate casualties which can include human rights, government transparency, and political dissent. These examples of realpolitik were initially protected from citizen oversight by the state secrets privilege (which will be discussed in more detail below). Nation-states hold secrets to prevent abuses of power or other illegitimate behaviors from discovery while seeking to maximize its interests.

For the purposes of criminology, the realpolitik perspective serves as a theoretical framework in which to understand state crime, state-corporate crime, as well state avoidance of punishment. In order to maximize their interests—which can be economic, militaristic, diplomatic, etc.—nation-states can engage in a myriad of criminal and other harmful activities that ignore the well-being of its or other nation's citizens. The realpolitik perspective can—and has been (Rothe, 2009)—used in the state crime theoretical framework. First openly advocated for in criminology by William Chambliss (1989) in his American Society of Criminology presidential address, researchers developing this framework have made great strides in our understanding of state crime in which theoretical refinement continues (Rothe, Ross, Mullins, Friedrichs, Michalowski, Barak, Kauzlarich, & Kramer, 2009). The state crime perspective asserts traditional definitions of crime are problematic because they often do not account for crimes of the powerful. Instead, myopic and legalistic definitions are adopted which exclude many activities conducted by societal elites. In order to include these actions, state crime scholars define crime as that which generates social harm (Rothe et al., 2009) and state crime as "the harm illegally or legally organized and inflicted upon people by their own governments or the governments of others" (Barak, 1990, p. 11). As evidenced above, realpolitik governance can be criminogenic because of the social harm it can generate like detainee abuse and torture.

American war crimes have been revealed through the release of the war logs and through the video "Collateral Murder." While the diplomatic cables may not reveal crimes and misdeeds of the magnitude found in the war logs, they still catalog foreign policy and diplomatic misconduct which generates social harm. Using diplomats to spy on various United Nations officials can be detrimental to foreign relations (Leigh & Harding, 2011) as is the U.S. obstruction of a "torture probe" by Spain (Rosenberg, 2010). Another cable unveiled U.S. meddling in Haitian politics (Ives, 2011). These three examples demonstrate U.S. engagement in activities that undermine foreign relations which are vital for a functioning body of international jurisprudence. Realpolitik explains why those events—and others—may have occurred and why the government became so upset when revealed. It is posited here that the United States was largely not concerned with maintaining foreign relations for ethical or moralistic reasons. Rather, these relationships were manipulated and maintained for the state's own interests. The mode of governance also helps explain the subsequent reaction of U.S. officials to the leaked documents, as shown in the following analysis.

While the leaked documents do present instances of social harm, they largely reveal relatively mundane details about U.S. diplomacy. Many of the details were considered to be so prosaic that the damage from the leaks was considered to be containable by the Obama Administration (Hosenball, 2011). The political and media controversy over WikiLeaks was a reaction to the leaking secret documents rather than the content of the documents themselves. Here, intense realpolitik is demonstrated to not only drive events of social harm but their concealment.

Secrecy is an important tool for a modern nation-state but it can be abused, particularly under realpolitik. State secrecy occurs when nation-states withhold information from the public. The goal is supposed to be self-preservation and the benefit of its citizens. State secrecy certainly has appropriate uses. Few reasonable people want nuclear missile

codes and schematics freely available to the rest of the world. In a democratic society, however, state secrecy can present a problem for government accountability (Kutz, 2009; Weaver & Pallitto, 2005). Three mechanisms are built into democracy supposedly allow citizens to oversee and control sovereigns—elections, public opinion, and public deliberation (Sagar, 2007). Each of these mechanisms requires a well-informed citizenry to make decisions which should serve to control national leaders according to idealism/democratic theory (Sagar, 2007; Kober, 1990). A well-informed citizenry, however, is a potential threat to political order and stability. Citizens who are informed about abuses of power and violations of the law will be less likely to support the current political order which may act as a catalyst for political change (Kober, 1990). Indeed, idealism dictates a true democracy with a well informed populace provides protections against acts of aggression by the state and this combination is more likely to support political change rather than stability and national interests (Kober, 1990).

For state secrecy to operate power must be given to the executive to decide what should (and should not be) qualified as a state secret. Citizens have to trust the capacity to decide what information to withhold is handled appropriately. This capability presents an immense amount of power to entrust a sovereign with. The state secrets privilege allows the state to withhold evidence from criminal cases against it (Ziegler, 2008) and implement laws and policies away from the purview of citizen oversight (Kutz, 2009). The privilege was formally instituted by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Reynolds* (1953) and is recognized as a legitimate instrument of the executive to prevent sensitive evidence from being revealed that could harm national security (Ziegler, 2008). As stated before, there certainly can be legitimate uses of the state secrets doctrine. The use of the doctrine, however, has expanded in the post-9/11 era (Ziegler, 2008). Currently, "there is a real danger that the government is using the privilege not to protect national security, but to cover up its own wrongdoing" (Ziegler, 2008, p. 692). Wrongdoing is often the result of

political officials engaging in acts of corruption, implementing policies that are illegal, or implementing laws or legal caveats without informing the populace (Weaver & Pallitto, 2005).

Sagar (2007) suggests one mechanism, out of many, that may be the most effective for government accountability which he calls *circumvention* (otherwise known as *leaking*). Many of the revelations of state crime and corruption brought to public attention are not revealed through mechanisms built into the structure of the government. They appear on the front pages of newspapers (Sagar, 2007). Leaks have provided details on state crimes and political corruption like The Pentagon Papers scandal from the Nixon era and the uncovering of detainee abuse, illegal use of wiretaps, and the practice of extraordinary rendition during George W. Bush's presidency. Given the latitude, within intense realpolitik, executives will over-use the state secrets privilege to avoid control and accountability.

The state reacts frantically when information is leaked on it or its officials. Leaking presents a threat to the power of the nation-state. If the state was concerned with the proper use of state secrets and the prevention of state crime and corruption then one would imagine these leaks—while violating the state secret privilege—would be accepted because they reveal problem policies and state secrets used to hide important information integral to democratic decision making by citizens. These leaks, as one can see from the WikiLeaks example presented later in this analysis, are largely met with condemnation regardless of what type of information is leaked. Rather than accepting problems, the priority is to control information and the image of the state.

In short, if citizens want to control state crime and corruption, according to democratic theory, they must be well informed (Sagar, 2007). The ability of states to hold secrets threatens this ability particularly when the state is allowed to decide what counts as

secret information. Any checks on the power of state secrecy, however, are problematic because they exclude citizens from the process (because, otherwise information is no longer secret). Leaking may be the only mechanism available for citizens to gain information on the government and determine if a state secret is problematic (Sagar, 2007). Realpolitik governance, at this point, steps in and demands this not occur because, as history shows, many of the leaks do not display the state favorably. In this sense, leaking presents a threat to the state's public image and, vicariously, power via public legitimacy. Before proceeding with the analysis, however, it would be beneficial to provide a more detailed description of WikiLeaks.

WIKILEAKS

WikiLeaks is a self-described "non-profit media organization" dedicated towards government transparency and unveiling human rights abuses around the world. The group was started by Julian Assange and others in 2006 (Huor & Lindquist, 2010; Leigh & Harding, 2011). WikiLeaks acts as an online venue for whistle-blowers to submit secret or classified documents (Leigh & Harding, 2011). Their focus is allowing leakers to hand documents over while protecting anonymity through various security measures such as TOR (the onion router) and PGP (pretty good privacy) (Leigh & Harding, 2011).[2] Once the documents are received, WikiLeaks hands them over to volunteers who verify the information and further obfuscate the identity of the leaker (Huor & Lindquist, 2010). Originally, in 2006, WikiLeaks hoped the general public would sift through the documents. Because of difficulty, however, of generating interest and interpreting the documents they now rely on professional journalists to help with the dissemination of stories contained in the leaks (Leigh & Harding, 2011).

WikiLeaks was initially conflicted about where to base itself. The organization eventually settled in Sweden because of the nation's protective freedom of speech laws

(Huor & Lindquist, 2010). The organization needs strong legal sheltering due to the sensitivity of the documents released. These documents include a U.S. Army training manual that reveals the sanctifying of harsh treatment of detainees at various military detention centers; a video of helicopter gunners killing civilians in Iraq; email messages from a private email account from former Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin used to bypass U.S. transparency laws; around 91,000 documents on the War in Afghanistan; nearly 400,000 leaked documents on the War in Iraq; and the diplomatic cables of concern for this analysis (Bohannon, 2010; Huor & Lindquist, 2010; O'Loughlin, Witmer, Linke, & Thorwardson, 2010).

The diplomatic cables are leaked emails from U.S. foreign diplomats. While many of the emails reveal relatively mundane details about U.S. foreign relations, they also unveil a darker side of U.S. diplomacy. As Leigh & Harding (2011) describe them:

> The cables discussed human rights abuses, corruption, and dubious financial ties between G8 leaders. They spoke of corporate espionage, dirty tricks and hidden bank accounts. In their private exchanges, US diplomats dispense with the platitudes that characterise much of their public job; they give relatively frank, unmediated assessments, offering a window into the mental processes at the top of US power. (p. 212)

WikiLeaks' release of classified and secret documents, particularly the diplomatic cables, have incited controversy yet few academic studies have been published on the whistle-blower organization (Allan & Andén-Papadopoulos; Heisbourg, 2011; O'Loughlin et al., 2010), which none have studied political or public rhetoric. It is precisely this gap in the literature this analysis seeks to fill. The following analysis of public official's responses to the leak of the diplomatic cables is demonstrative of this realpolitik approach towards state secrecy.

ANALYSIS: WIKILEAKS AND REALPOLITIK

Methodology

In the events surrounding the controversy of the diplomatic cables' release, common themes emerged in the rhetoric of public officials. Generally, statements seemed to avoid issues revealed by the documents and focused on condemning WikiLeaks. At this juncture, further investigation was merited through a content analysis which involved a systematic collection of news articles to locate public official's reactions (both statements and actions) concerning the organization. For the analysis, an inductive grounded theoretical approach was adopted. This methodology is divided into two separate parts: the sampling procedure for the news articles and the grounded theory approach applied to this study.

The units of analysis for this study were statements and actions of politicians concerning WikiLeaks, suspected leakers, and the release of the diplomatic cables as published in news media. According to priming theory, news media's choices of coverage have the power to "prime" or predispose public opinion to be shifted in a particular direction on a topic, such as WikiLeaks (Brug, Semetko, & Valkenburg, 2007; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). Because news media often relies on government officials to provide information or perspective, these officials have an immense amount of power in shaping public opinion. As Zaller (1992) states, "when elites uphold a clear picture of what should be done, the public tends to see events from that point of view, with the most politically attentive members of the public most likely to adopt the elite position" (p. 9). This power to prime also implies the power to manipulate. This analysis demonstrates that government officials' public statements, as presented in mass media outlets, attempt to manipulate public opinion by presenting WikiLeaks in a manner conducive to realpolitik governance. For the purposes of this analysis, politicians or officials are defined as,

"persons who are elected into a public office or those who publically represent those elected."

A sample of these reactions was gathered through a systematic search of online news articles. To be included, articles had to be dated between December 1st, 2010 and January 18th, 2011. This period was when media and government officials were focusing on WikiLeaks after the organization had begun releasing the diplomatic cables on November 28th, 2010. Establishing the data range at December 1st allowed time for the news of the leak to spread; for political officials to react; and media outlets to report on the reactions of political officials. The January 18th cutoff was selected because, at this point, coverage of the release of the diplomatic cables slowed. The reader should note this methodology was used to search for a plethora of news articles that document government official's statements for or against WikiLeaks to ensure as many political reactions as possible were included in the analysis.

Previous studies using online news articles have relied on Internet news search engines provide relevant articles (Adams & Jennison, 2007; Carlson, 2007; Stinson, Liederbach, & Freiburger, 2011). This approach, however, yielded far too many articles for this particular analysis. For example, Google News displayed 60,800 results for the term "WikiLeaks" within the sampling time frame. Because of this plethora of results, this study used a selection of popular online news sites instead: *CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, The Washington Post, The Wall-Street Journal, The New York Times, Wired Magazine, AlterNet,* and *The Huffington Post*.

CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and *The New York Times* were chosen because they are popular mainstream news sources. *Wired Magazine* was chosen for its exclusive reporting of WikiLeaks related news, hacking, and hacktivism. *AlterNet* was selected because it specializes in stories that pass under the radar

of mainstream press. Finally, *The Huffington Post* was selected because it is a popular news website which specializes in aggregating multiples sources of news. By searching *AlterNet* and *The Huffington Post*, relevant results from other websites were incorporated into the sample without sifting through many of the superfluous results offered by online news search engines. Websites for the initial search are referred to as *primary outlets* while results stemming from links given in primary outlets are called *tertiary outlets* which include news articles from other websites, posts from reputable blogs, and videos about WikiLeaks, the diplomatic cables, and politicians' statements.

Each website was searched for the term "WikiLeaks." After the initial search and the following incorporation of other websites, a total of 843 websites, blogs, and videos (hereby referred to as "sources") were yielded. These sources were then scanned for discussion of public official's rhetoric or behaviors towards WikiLeaks and its affiliates which wrought 78 results. A source was considered relevant to analysis if it specifically mentioned a political official's statements about WikiLeaks or its affiliates (leakers, employers, or leaders). Sources which described actions taken by the government against WikiLeaks and its affiliates were also considered. Additionally, Leigh & Harding (2011) —executive editor and journalist respectively—in their book *WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy,* documented political rhetoric and actions as well. This book is treated as a source of data for analysis which brings the total of data sources to 79. There was a great deal of repetition in these sources. This repetition is beneficial because it provides multiples sources to verify statements or actions used in the analysis. It is, however, limited in that only statements and actions that received media attention are included. Total, there are 14 statements/speeches[3] and 12 actions[4] which are the subject of the ensuing analysis. Table 1 provides a summary of the Internet-based sources.

Table 1

List of Sources

Primary Outlets	WikiLeaks Sources Gathered	Sources Relevant to Analysis
CNN	58	1
MSNBC	64	2
Fox News	68	4
The New York Times	32	2
Wired Magazine	27	1
The Huffington Post	123	15
AlterNet	26	4
The Washington Post	281	33
The Wall Street Journal	164	6
Tertiary Outlets		
The Guardian		2
Reuters		1
National Journal		1
The Atlantic		1
Blogs		2
MyFDL		1
Newser		1
CBS News		1
Total	843	78

The sampling technique chosen for this study was designed to attain a reasonably comprehensive list of public officials' reactions. This comprehensive technique also provides a solid foundation to begin grounded theory analysis. As Charmaz (2006) states, "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (p. 2). This involves an inductive approach to the data that proceeds from the empirical to gradually more abstract categories and themes (Charmaz, 2006). Rather than beginning with a theory and then gathering data to prove or verify it, this approach allows the data to speak

freely with theories and explanations bending and conforming to the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). The primary virtue of grounded theory as a methodological approach to analyzing qualitative data is its flexibility which allows the approach to be tailored for the needs of each study (Charmaz, 2006). This analysis began with the statements and actions of politicians, contextualized them, and then worked up—through inductive synthesis—to a theoretical framework organized by realpolitik and state secrecy. What follows is the result of this inductive approach.

U.S. Realpolitik

The period of time following the release of the diplomatic cables was rife with realpolitik. U.S. officials were quick to publicly denounce WikiLeaks. The rhetoric used ranged from simple condemnations, to threats of legal punishment, and even to calls for execution. Two general themes emerged in the data that organize this analysis. The first regards statements made about whistle-blowing that are, on their surface, supportive but leave room for the U.S. realpolitik state to interpret a given situation/person/group as within or outside the scope of their conceptualization of 'whistle-blower' which I have termed *arbitrary rhetoric*. Analysis of this theme focuses specifically on statements and actions made by the Obama Administration who claimed to uphold values of Internet freedom, whistle-blowing, and political dissent but discussed WikiLeaks and its affiliates in a way that denied them an association with those values. The Obama Administration was not purposely selected to be the thrust of this section. Rather, officials from the administration provided the most evidence for the idea of arbitrary rhetoric.

The second theme concerns realpolitik-driven condemnation of WikiLeaks in addition to the political labeling of the organization as criminal or terrorist. By labeling the organization negatively the government can exercise its legitimacy over it. Both of these concepts work together in tandem. The problems of arbitrary rhetoric are easier to overlook

when the object of discussion is characterized as an "other" or different than the ideal. This particular section incorporates political officials outside of the Obama Administration.

Arbitrary Rhetoric

The first area of political discourse in which realpolitik is apparent in is the arbitrary rhetoric of the Obama Administration. The first example is from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. As Secretary of State, Secretary Clinton acts as the representative of U.S. foreign policy and her statements generally convey the U.S. federal government's stance on the Internet, free speech, and government transparency. In a speech given on January 21st, 2010, Secretary Clinton heralded the virtues of technology as well as offered words of caution about the associated dangers:

> In many respects, information has never been so free. There are more ways to spread more ideas to more people than at any moment in history. Even in authoritarian countries, information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable…The same networks that help organize movements for freedom also enable al Qaeda to spew hatred and incite violence against the innocent. Any technologies with the potential to open up access to government and promote transparency can also be hijacked by governments to crush dissent and deny human rights. (Clinton, 2010a)

In this speech, Secretary Clinton appears to welcome political dissent and whistle-blowing and condemn countries that seek to suppress opposition. By invoking al Qaeda, however, Clinton has left room for interpretation. This allows the government to characterize an organization as using the Internet in a similar manner to al Qaeda or using it for "legitimate" freedom-fighting purposes. Here, the Internet is characterized as a tool which can be used for socially beneficial or detrimental ends. Determining what is detrimental or beneficial is something left to the interpretation of the U.S. government. This *arbitrary*

interpretation can be seen months later when Secretary Clinton, in response to the leaked diplomatic cables, condemned the actions of WikiLeaks:

> There is nothing laudable about endangering innocent people, and there is nothing brave about sabotaging the peaceful relations between nations on which our common security depends. There have been examples in history in which official conduct has been made public in the name of exposing wrongdoings or misdeeds. This is not one of those cases. (Clinton, 2010b)

Originally, the administration vocally supported whistle-blowing and government transparency. The government, however, in exercising arbitrary rhetoric, interpreted WikiLeaks as not constituting a whistle-blower organization and condemned them following the leaks of the diplomatic cables. Secretary Clinton claimed the Internet can be a valuable tool for exercising democracy and protest. When documents informing the people of the activities of the U.S. government were released, however, the whistle-blowers were construed as a hindrance and a danger to the activities of the United States. The government chose to interpret WikiLeaks as an organization seeking to undermine security and peace rather than as a whistle-blower organization.

The next point of discussion concerns the Obama Administration in general with emphasis on President Obama and Vice President Biden. Once President Obama was elected president, the website *Change.gov* was launched for the purposes of the transition between presidencies. Here, President Obama and Vice President Biden detailed their vision for ethics in their coming administration (http://change.gov/agenda/ethics_agenda/). One of the items mentioned was the protection of whistle-blowers:

> Often the best source of information about waste, fraud, and abuse in government is an existing government employee committed to public integrity and willing to speak out… Barack Obama will strengthen whistleblower laws to protect federal workers

> who expose waste, fraud, and abuse of authority in government. Obama will ensure that federal agencies expedite the process for reviewing whistleblower claims and whistleblowers have full access to courts and due process. (*Change.gov*)

Note that a whistle-blower is a "government employee committed to public integrity and willing to speak out." What constitutes public integrity is not defined. Here, a promise is made to uphold the values of government transparency and whistle-blowing but the promise relies on many flexible buzzwords such as "integrity," "abuse of authority," and "wrongdoing." By not being defined these are concepts open to interpretation. This renders Obama and Biden's statement on whistle-blowing as arbitrary rhetoric.

President Obama pledged to create a more open and transparent government when elected and vowed to protect whistle-blowers. When WikiLeaks forced government transparency on the United States, however, the President decided to exercise the potential of arbitrary rhetoric. During this time, the Administration struggled to find ways to prosecute Julian Assange and detained Private First Class (PFC) Bradley Manning, a suspected leaker who worked for U.S. Army Intelligence. Interpretation of WikiLeaks and its associates' actions were subject to arbitrary rhetoric driven by a realpolitik mentality. Designating who is or is not a whistle-blower is left to the state to determine. The message is those who force government transparency in other countries should be exalted but this is not the case for those who force transparency on the United States.

Initially, the government wanted to prosecute Assange under the Espionage Act of 1917 (Kohn, 2010). This Act sought to prevent the theft of state secrets concerning national defense with the purpose to harm the United States; efforts to drive others refuse to fulfill duties; and the obstruction military recruitment or enlistment (Galison, 2010; Stone, 2003; Stone, 2009). Essentially, the two purposes of the Act were to protect documents sensitive to national defense and the prevent propaganda warfare (Galison,

2010; Stone, 2003). The problem with using The Espionage Act against Julian Assange is he is neither a U.S. citizen nor was he the one who initially leaked the documents prosecution was not possible. In response, the SHIELD Act (Securing Human Intelligence and Enforcing Lawful Dissemination Act) was proposed in both houses of Congress (Poulsen, 2010). This Act was aimed to be an amendment to the Espionage Act. As Poulsen (2010) stated, the Act would "make it a federal crime for anyone to publish the name of a U.S. intelligence source… a direct swipe at the secret-spilling website WikiLeaks." As critics have pointed out, this may violate the First Amendment since the act could be applied to those who publish leaked documents after receiving them (Poulsen, 2010; Stone, 2011). In addition, efforts were made during this time to establish a direct link between Assange and Manning. If this connection could be made then Assange could be charged as a conspirator under the Espionage Act (Savage, 2010). From this evidence, the conclusion drawn is the U.S. government is not making an effort to protect whistle-blowers. Just the opposite has occurred; the U.S. reserves the right to define who is and who is not a whistle-blower and seeks ways to prosecute those who are not categorized as such.

Disregard for the protection of whistle-blowers was demonstrated by the detention of suspected leaker, PFC Bradley Manning. At the time of this analysis, Manning was detained in conditions some consider torture (Coombs, 2010; Greenwald, 2010; Holland, 2010) primarily through social isolation which can have dire consequences (Arrigo & Bullock, 2008). While this treatment of Manning may be legal under current U.S. federal and military law, it does not seem like treatment appropriate for a whistle-blower who was supposed to have deserved the protection of the Obama Administration. Manning was not protected and seems to have been punished without due process for whistle-blowing which was promised by the Obama Administration.

Arbitrary rhetoric allows the state to make contingent promises and mandates while allowing elites to decide which groups or individuals will be protected or considered by

them. The argument here is *the process of employing arbitrary rhetoric and then deciding who is covered is a result of intense realpolitik*. In WikiLeaks' case, arbitrary rhetoric allowed the state to choose to interpret the organization as not to be protected as legitimate whistle-blowers. If they do not count as legitimate whistle-blowers then the administration can legitimately pursue them for revealing state secrets. The next section describes the next component necessary for the arbitrary rhetoric to work and how it has been applied to WikiLeaks.

Condemnation and Labeling of WikiLeaks

The use of arbitrary rhetoric by the Obama Administration—as interested as it may be—is not the only evidence of U.S. interest-based realpolitik governance at work. The concept only leaves room for interpretation by government officials. The other component necessary for the success of arbitrary rhetoric is *labeling.* For persons or groups to be subjected to arbitrary rhetoric, they must be characterized in such a way that makes it appropriate. Many political officials have made statements and claims about WikiLeaks which reflect this. These statements have characterized WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, and leakers as terrorists and criminals. The labeling found here is similar to that described by Howard Becker (1963). This process involves a group (the government), "making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance," (Becker, 1963, p. 9) and then applying the label of "deviant" or "criminal" to those who violate the rules. The rule is the state secrets doctrine whose use, in this case, is guided by realpolitik, embodied in arbitrary rhetoric, and involves protecting United States' authority and interests. WikiLeaks violated this rule and is thus labeled deviant.

The labeling of WikiLeaks emerged from both sides of the U.S. political spectrum. Vice President Biden, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip Crowley, and Rep. Peter King asserted Julian Assange and/or

WikiLeaks constitute a "high-tech" terrorist organization ("Biden Slams," 2010; Leigh & Harding, 2011; Rubin, 2010b; Sheridan, 2010). Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Sen. Jeff Sessions argued for the prosecution of WikiLeaks (Rubin, 2010a; Serwer, 2010). In a move that could be interpreted as an attempt to intimidate media outlets from publishing stories based out of the leaked documents, Sen. Joe Lieberman suggested *The New York Times* may have violated the Espionage Act by receiving the diplomatic cables and running stories from them (Mirkinson, 2010). Secretary Clinton, former Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, Attorney General Eric Holder, Sen. Lieberman, Sen. Susan Collins, and Sen. John Kerry claimed the release of the diplomatic cables harmed U.S. international relations and placed various diplomats and insiders in danger (Lieberman & Collins, 2011; Samuels, 2010; Virginia, 2010). These statements do not address the state's ethical problems shown by the cables. The statements address the safety of those who may have engaged in activity potentially detrimental to foreign relations or the safety of the nation. While this may be a valid concern, it ignores any problems revealed by the leaks which need to be addressed.

All of these statements, cries, outrages, and general rhetoric by political officials are demonstrative of realpolitik. Little concern is given towards the details and the content of the leaked documents. Any problems revealed remain unacknowledged. The only concern is someone has threatened U.S. control of information and the belief is this person/organization should be prosecuted, condemned, and/or executed.

By categorizing WikiLeaks as an organization engaged in illegal behavior, the U.S. government made obtaining funding more difficult and indirectly punished the organization for crimes it had not been formally charged with at the time of this analysis. Shortly after the release of the diplomatic cables, a number of financial operations—such as Visa, MasterCard, PayPal, and Bank of America—stopped processing donations to WikiLeaks (Addley & Halliday, 2010; McCarthy, 2010; Satter & Lawless, 2010). These companies discontinued processing payments supposedly because of alleged illegal activities engaged

in by the organization or supposed breaching of policy (Addley & Halliday, 2010; Satter & Lawless, 2010; Musil, 2010). It could be the case that these companies have stopped processing payments because they did not want to be implicated if WikiLeaks was shown to be engaged in illegal activity. Currently no evidence exists that the organization broke any laws. It may also be that these companies desisted because of pressure and labeling from the U.S. government. Osama Bedier, PayPal's vice-president of platform, said the state department issued a letter to them declaring WikiLeaks' activities as illegal and they were to suspend WikiLeaks' account (Addley & Halliday, 2010).

In addition to their finances, server space for WikiLeaks was under attack. When the diplomatic cables were first leaked, distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks were conducted against WikiLeaks' servers (Leigh & Harding, 2011). These attacks brought WikiLeaks' website down. Assange then moved WikiLeaks to Amazon's "Elastic Cloud Computing" servers which were capable of withstanding the DDoS attacks. Sen. Lieberman, however, did not find this acceptable and, "called Amazon and urged them to stop hosting WikiLeaks" (Leigh & Harding, 2011, p. 205). Amazon complied. The organization had not been shown to have broken any laws and, because of this, the punishment is not a legal one but based on realpolitik. Donations and server space have been obstructed because the organization leaked documents the U.S. does not approve of.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on the intersection between realpolitik, state secrecy, state crime, and the WikiLeaks controversy. After establishing the realpolitik philosophy of governance as a means to understand state crime and state secrecy, the statements and actions of political officials towards WikiLeaks following the release of the diplomatic cables were analyzed. Emphasis was placed on revealing the realpolitik nature of these reactions. Two general rhetorical mechanisms were found to be used by political officials regarding whistle-

blowing and WikiLeaks. The first was arbitrary rhetoric which involved politicians simultaneously (1) creating an impression of government support for whistle-blowing and government transparency and (2) allowing themselves the ability to interpret who qualifies as a whistle-blower. The second mechanism was condemnation or labeling. For the state to claim a person (or a group) is not a whistle-blower, she or he must be described in a way which makes it appropriate for the state to not consider them a whistle-blower (such as describing the person as a "terrorist").

After studying WikiLeaks controversy and the subsequent political fallout, three questions emerge, "was the fiery rhetoric worth it? Was it justifiable considering the content of the cables? Did the documents give enough information to be a substantial danger to the United States?" The answer to all three seems to be "no." Immediately after formal data collection ended, an article was published in *Reuters* discussing the Obama Administration's assessment of the damage that could be inflicted by the leaked diplomatic cables (Hosenball, 2011). In a briefing that occurred in late 2010, State Department officials informed Congress that U.S. foreign policy should remain relatively undamaged (Hosenball, 2011). Despite the containability of the WikiLeaks fallout, the Obama Administration felt that it should declare the release of the diplomatic cables as damaging in order to rally support for legal efforts to bring down WikiLeaks and the leakers (Hosenball, 2011). This tactic is similar to what happened regarding the supposed fallout from the release of the war logs. The Pentagon reviewed the documents and found no evidence the documents posed a threat to American troops (Isikoff, 2010). As Leigh & Harding (2011) state, "no one has been able to demonstrate any damage to life or limb" (p. 6).

If these leaks were assessed to provide little to no damage, why was there so much discussion about the potential danger they present? Manjikian (2010) offers some insight into an explanation. According to her, from a realist (realpolitik) perspective, information acts as an effective weapon. While she is specifically referring to state-waged information

warfare, one can see that if the state views information as an effective weapon for their purposes then it will recognize information can be used as a weapon against it—hence the heavy use of the state secrets privilege (Zieger, 2008). While the leaks may not have been considered dangerous, they may have been perceived as a political information bomb aimed at undermining the U.S. governments' legitimacy.

It is important to note that the Administration has shown some restraint in pursuing WikiLeaks. In mid-January 2011, the U.S. Treasury Department refused to blacklist the organization (Weller, 2011). Blacklisting would have allowed the government to prevent and/or punish anyone engaged in economic dealings with Assange or WikiLeaks. In addition, Representative Ron Paul openly defended whistle-blowing and organizations like WikiLeaks (Linkins, 2010). In an excerpt from a speech he gave on the House floor which represents his general view on the matter he inquired, "Was it not once considered patriotic to stand up to our government when it is wrong? Thomas Jefferson had it right when he advised 'Let the eyes of vigilance never be closed'" (as quoted in Linkins, 2010). This demonstrates not every decision or decision maker exemplifies realpolitik in this situation. In addition, during this time a bill worked its way through the legislation which sought to create greater protections for government whistle-blowers (Smith, 2010). The bill passed the house but halted in the senate after an "unnamed senator" held up the bill. While in the House, the bill was also altered to exempt national security and intelligence employees from the added protections provided by the new bill.

The realpolitik perspective is invaluable in understanding the WikiLeaks controversy. The perspective contributes to our understanding of the motivations of nation-states and how actions and rhetoric are driven by these motivations. Various explanations—ranging from radical to mundane—may be used to explain the various motivations themselves but realpolitik serves to explain the interest-based mode of governance as a whole, not just the

individual interests. The U.S. government is acting towards WikiLeaks out of its own interests for power and control.

Realpolitik informs and drives a great deal of the political rhetoric in the United States. This is dangerous because it can cloud our perceptions of the relevance and pertinence of the leaked documents. Actions taken on the basis of realpolitik can also have severe implications for our rights as citizens within the United States. For example, some have suggested that extending various laws to prosecute Julian Assange and WikiLeaks can have negative implications for Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Speech (Kohn, 2010). While it may have been illegal to disclose these documents, failing to fairly and justly treat leakers/whistle-blowers erodes our ability to hold the U.S. government accountable for its behavior, as exemplified by the treatment of PFC Bradley Manning. Citizens will be reluctant to whistle-blow if they will face stiff and unfair retribution. Of course, the idea of holding an international superpower accountable for its actions may be a kite dream. Shifting realpolitik governance may be a difficult if not impossible task to undergo without making massive political changes. That said, a positive step in the right direction would be increased protections for whistleblowers. While this may not yield substantive changes it would serve to help protect the political rights of individuals.

Moving forward, more research is necessary to establish the extent of realpolitik governance in governmental decision making and actions. In addition, future research should address the limitations of the current study in order to verify the findings presented here. The first limitation is this study's use of secondary data sources. Searches through government officials' or agencies' press statements would serve as a significant source of data for further inquiry. The second limitation is this study was limited by a small sample size. Again, this could be resolved by referring to primary data sources. Systematically gathering of these sources could be problematic and would probably be time-consuming but future analysis would be better for it.

As demonstrated, realpolitik may prove to be a vital perspective in the years to come for understanding the social problems wrought by conflicts over government transparency, whistle-blowing, and state secrecy in our increasingly globalized world as seen in situations like WikiLeaks' release of the diplomatic cables. Scholars would do well to employ Realpolitik explanations into future studies of state behavior.

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Endnotes

[1] Former chief of staff to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. Quoted in Goodman, 2010.

[2] The Onion Router (TOR) is a piece of software which protects the user against various forms of online surveillance. TOR works by hiding the user's connections within the totality of traffic occurring over TOR's network. This prevents a person monitoring network traffic from seeing who the user is connected to. Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) is a form of data encryption. PGP essentially makes the data unreadable except for those who have a key to decipher the data. Encryption can be "ciphered" (or cracked) but the more sophisticated the encryption, the more difficult this becomes.

[3] List of statements: (1) Secretary Clinton's response to the release of the diplomatic cables; (2) Vice President Biden's, (3) Senator McConnell's, (4) Assistant Secretary of State of Public Affairs Crowley's, and (5) Representative King's comparison of WikiLeaks to terrorists; (6) Senator Lieberman's suggestion that *The New York Times* violated the Espionage Act of 1917; (7) Secretary Clinton's, (8) former Press Secretary Gibbs', (9) Senator Lieberman's, (10) Senator Collin's, (11) Senator Kerry's, and (12) Attorney General Holder's assertion of harm by WikiLeaks; (13) Obama Administration assessing damage done by leaks was minimal; (14) Representative Paul defending WikiLeaks on House floor.

[4] List of actions: (1) arrest of Bradley Manning; (2) Obama Administration's attempt to prosecute Assange under Espionage Act; (3) proposal of SHIELD act; (4) attempt to establish link between Manning and Assange; (5) conditions of Manning's detention; (6) Visa, (7) MasterCard, (8) PayPal, and (9) Bank of America cancelling financial transactions to WikiLeaks; (10) Lieberman pressuring Amazon; (11) Obama Administration continuing to pursue WikiLeaks despite minimal harm done; (12) U.S. Treasury Department refused to blacklist WikiLeaks.