Framing Transparency in the U.S. – A Cross-Media Analysis of the Debate on WikiLeaks

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Introduction

On 28 November 2010, the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks, in possession of about 250.000 classified U.S. diplomatic cables, published a sample of 220 cables in cooperation with five internationally renowned news outlets, the *New York Times (USA),* the *Guardian (UK), der Spiegel (DE), Le Monde (FR)* and *El País (ES).* The cables had been previously retrieved without permission from the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network (SIPRNet), the U.S. military Internet system run by the Defence Department. This event caused uproar in the United States as well as globally, and resulted in a debate on the extent of secrecy and transparency required in U.S. politics. This debate is object of the study at hand.

Some scholars have argued that the novelty of WikiLeaks for transparency is its usage of new technologies, acting as an example for the start of a new technological information era. Cull (2011), for instance, has argued that WikiLeaks exemplifies a "shift in power" made possible by "the technological revolution" that "has given one individual the communication power that was the monopoly of the nation state in the previous century" (pp. 2-3). As Bunz (2011) further outlines, Wikileaks shows how information from one can be send to many through the "digitalisation of knowledge" (pp. 139-140), whereby it has become easy to transport a great amount of information using minimal space. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the autopsy of data has become easy as programs help us order and analyse information. It is also an example of how the Internet has made it possible for anyone to publish and access information at any time (ibid.).

In this chapter, we suggest that technology alone is insufficient to create different transparency standards and change the way politics are conducted. In line with Florini (2002), we believe that "transparency is a choice, encouraged by changing attitudes about what constitutes appropriate behavior" (p. 13). Thus, new technology must be accompanied by a change in attitudes, as "without a norm of transparency, technology will continue to protect private information as well as ferret it out" (Florini, 2002, p. 15). Studying the debate triggered by WikiLeaks presents the opportunity to examine whether

its revelations have strengthened transparency in public perception, or if WikiLeaks is no more than the example of new technological means without any real impact on the discursive boundary between publicity and secrecy.

Defining this boundary is a form of exerting power. Julian Assange, the master mind behind WikiLeaks and his crew of volunteers decided to cross the boundary of secrecy as defined by the U.S. government. They published what they believed everyone should know and created with their website a new forum for public knowledge. As discussed above, we believe that technology alone does not create power, it needs public support to redraw the line between secrecy and transparency. This makes an analysis of the public debate essential to evaluating the impact of WikiLeaks on transparency.

In-depth studies of public discussions on WikiLeaks are still lacking. As far as we are aware, to date there has been just one study on public reactions to WikiLeaks, which analyses discussions of the leaks of the diplomatic cables on Australian news websites (Flew & Liu, 2011). Focusing on WikiLeaks' effect on the conduct of international diplomacy, democracy and journalism, Flew and Liu (2011) find that "it has revived an understanding of journalism as being about promoting radical transparency and challenging government secrecy in foreign policy. In that respect, it is consistent with earlier traditions of investigative journalism, such as the publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, updating such techniques to an age of digital networks and ubiquitous information" (p. 9). Their analysis suggests a favourable perception of WikiLeaks in Australia, further supported by few claims on punishing Julian Assange.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the reactions of important groups among the American public. We believe that studying the reactions specifically in the U.S. context is significant because America constitutes the main 'target' of WikiLeaks. We will use the debate to explore how transparency is presented and discussed. Our findings in the U.S. case suggest very different developments from those in Australia as argued by Flew and Liu (2011). Instead of challenging government secrecy, a majority of U.S. journalists and bloggers have tended to rhetorically reinforce its necessity in diplomacy, and many have argued to punish Assange as a criminal. Examining transparency, its perceived limitations and counter-narratives, we claim that the boundary between publicity and secrecy in United States' public perception has shifted towards secrecy as a result of WikiLeaks' release of classified diplomatic cables. Our findings show that transparency encounters strong resistance in the form of national security arguments. This process may arguably be perceived as a reinvention of secrecy.

In order to establish the perception of transparency in the WikiLeaks debate on the diplomatic cables, we analyse reactions found on three platforms: the U.S. government website(press statements by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and prominent diplomats),

five major U.S. newspapers[23] and five influential U.S. political blogs[24]. These public reactions will be contrasted to WikiLeaks' vision of transparency. We have chosen this wide array of sources because we believe that they originate from actors with different interests. First, WikiLeaks is promoting the freedom of the Internet and favours absolute transparency. Second, bloggers, too, may be inclined toward Internet freedom. At the same time, they presumably constitute the most unrestricted source of public information amongst the four. Third, journalists publish information as their central job, and whistle-blowing is part of how they receive information. Hence, they might be in favour of it, in particular the *New York Times,* which contributed to the publication of the cables. Nonetheless, newspapers constitute the traditional gatekeepers to information and thus they may perceive WikiLeaks as a challenge to their role. Lastly, the U.S. government arguably has a strong stake in the debate by having the power over its information threatened.

For our analysis we made use of theories on framing. In line with the conception of Entman (1993), we understand a frame as the attempt to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). In an inductive way we have established three frames: the national security frame, the accountability frame, and the mediated transparency frame. These frames have not been identified so far, and constitute an important novelty of our research. In order to provide an answer to our main research question of how WikiLeaks has influenced the boundaries of secrecy in U.S. public opinion, the following structure will be applied. We will first give a more elaborate outline of the use of framing as an analytical tool for our chapter. Second, the notion of transparency favoured by WikiLeaks will be discussed as it serves as a counter-position to our remaining data. Third, we will juxtapose this rather radical notion of transparency with the frames found in the public debate. In a follow-up discussion, we will then evaluate the prominence of each frame.

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23   *USA Today, New York Times, New York Daily News, New York Post,* and *Washington Post.*

24   *Huffington Post, Think Progress, the Foundry, Crooks and Liars,* and *Michelle Malkin*

National Security – "It's WikiHateAmerica"

1) *The Government.* The national security frame was first articulated by the U.S. government in an immediate reaction to the publication of the cables on November 30, 2010. It may thus be seen as the government's attempt to provide a dominant definition of the problems caused, and the actions that need to be taken. In the press statement issued by Hillary Clinton, leaks are defined as "illegal disclosure" that "threatens [...] national security", "puts people's lives in danger" and constitutes "an attack on America's foreign policy interests" and "an attack on the international community". She emphasises human rights activists and journalists among those who are threatened by the release of cables, possibly to position the government and its diplomats as the good force fighting evil with the help of well-respected activists now endangered by the leaks. The frame offered by the government introduces the following interpretation:

> "I want to set the record straight: 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."

In this line of reasoning, WikiLeaks are the bad guys that have acted irresponsibly by leaking classified material, the government is the responsible actor that classifies material to ensure the safety of the good guys and the security of the United States. American diplomats, whose work is complicated by the leaks, are working hard to "secure dangerous material, to fight international crime, to assist human rights defenders, to restore our alliances, to ensure global economic stability", and they serve America in pursing this role. The consequences that will be following from the leaks will endanger national security and be "a real risk to real people".

To counter claims for more transparency in foreign relations, Clinton introduces what may be called 'the confidentiality argument', the claim that confidentiality constitutes a legitimate exception to transparency:

> "In almost every profession – whether it's law or journalism, finance or medicine or academia or running a small business – people rely on confidential communications to do their jobs. We count on the space of trust that confidentiality provides. When someone breaches that trust, we are all worse off for it. And so despite some rhetoric we've heard these past few days, confidential communications do not run counter to the public interest. They are fundamental to our ability to serve the public interest."

In this statement, Clinton creates a rhetorical link between confidentiality and trust, which enables the government to function better according to public interest than if it was transparent in its actions. She emphasises that diplomatic conversations "depend

on trust and confidence" and thus require being "confidential". Leaking these documents therefore implies to "tear at the fabric of the proper function of responsible government". In this interpretation, the leaks do "not serve the public good" and are irresponsible. Thus, without introducing the term secrecy, she justifies keeping secrets when one wants to act responsibly. Notably, instead of referring to the blast of government secrets, Clinton as well as her press officer in a subsequent press briefing, only refer to the leaks as 'classified material'. Likewise, the term transparency is omitted in Clinton's statement. The relevance of these terms to the debate is tangible and obvious, but the government attempts to instigate security and confidentiality instead.

In the following days, diplomats echoed the state line. Ambassador to Germany Philip Murphy portrayed the leaks as an "irresponsible act" that makes the world "more complicated". Similarly, Jeff Bleich, Ambassador to Australia, stated that they constitute a "breach of security" and that those who leaked them "committed crimes".

2) *The media and blogger sphere* It is impressive to see how extensively both well-established and sensationalist papers, as well as influential bloggers adopted this frame (about one third of all articles uncritically followed the government's line). It is used by journalists in traditional newspapers, both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* and *USA Today,* in tabloids (*New York Post, New York Daily News*), among the conservative bloggers *Michelle Malkin* and *the Foundry*, as well as a variety of bloggers from the *Huffington Post*. Exceptions to the usage of this frame, notably, are the blogs *Crooks and Liars* and *Think Progress*. They position themselves as liberal and/or anti-establishment sites that omit popular frames and publish individualist interpretation instead.

In the interpretation of those using this frame, Julian Assange takes the role as an "(info) anarchist" (e.g. Botell, Freeman, Brooks), promoting radical transparency at any cost. The price to pay is national security, privacy and the lives of individuals. Podhoretz of the *New York Post* has written a vivid example of how the story was portrayed:

> "What happened here is this: A 21-year-old Army private working at a lone computer north of Baghdad logs on to a secure secret parallel Internet, puts billions of classified words on a thumb drive and gives them to an evil man in Sweden whose shadowy group is dedicated to destroying the foreign policy of the United States no matter the consequences."

Often, these texts also contain attempts to legitimise secrecy as an existential part of diplomacy (e.g. Walser, Pashman, Feffer, Krauthammer, Hirst). Using commonly known phrasings, the authors contend that diplomats are honest men sent abroad to lie for the good of their country (e.g. Walser) or that "Like Vegas, what happens in diplomacy sometimes should just stay in diplomacy" (e.g. Feffer). The claims of those using this frame

echo Clinton's confidentiality argument, used to legitimise secrecy. An elaborate version of the argument was written by Hirst on the *Huffington Post* website:

> "For the myriad of people who believe that the Wikileaks fiasco represents a necessary jolt of transparency into the world of international diplomacy, a crash course is desperately needed. The well-scripted job of world diplomats is to be the emissary of their home country to deliver messages, retrieve information and provide essential data to their respective capitals. [...] This activity is shrouded by a veil of secrecy, a sacred bond that has withstood through millennia. In the construction of bilateral relations that stand the test of time, other countries need candid assessments, frank opinions and practical information - as do we. This frank exchange is governed by a code; akin to attorney-client privilege, or doctor-patient confidentiality."

Transparency becomes the lesser good; instead diplomatic secrecy is justified by the need to build lasting bilateral relations and national security. Helle Dale from *the Foundry* ironically questions whether Americans "deserve transparency"? In her eyes, "what Americans deserve is a government of sufficient checks and balances to prevent abuse and misconduct", but "Americans do not deserve to have their diplomats confidential communications blasted out to the global public to friend and foe alike." As in the argument of Hillary Clinton, the need for trust in American diplomats is a significant element in the line of argumentation (e.g. Phillips, Ashing, Brooks, Cohen). Cohen from the *Washington Post* argues that "total transparency produces total opaqueness. If everything's open, no one says anything." Brooks from the *New York Times* adds that:

> "the quality of the conversation is determined by the level of trust. Its direction is influenced by persuasion and by feelings about friends and enemies. The quality of the conversation is damaged by exposure, just as our relationships with our neighbors would be damaged if every private assessment were brought to the light of day."

A common characteristic of texts containing this frame is a strongly patriotic tone. Lowry from the *Daily News* puts it as: "It's WikiHateAmerica". His colleague McCarthy views the leaks as an "anti-American campaign". Carafano from the *New York Post* states that WikiLeaks' 'mission' is "embarrassing and weakening America". In similar vein, influential blogger *Michelle Malkin* argues that the whole thing is "simply a case of WikiLeaks trying to weaken America's hand by revealing some of the cards it's holding". Like others, *Malkin* makes strong usage of war metaphors. In her eyes those from WikiLeaks are "America-haters", aiming at "destructive sabotage of secure diplomatic communications", to "disarm" the government "under the guise of the 'public's right to know'".

The most prominent actors attacked in this frame are Julian Assange, WikiLeaks as an

organisation, and Bradley Manning, presumably the leaker of the documents. Cupp from the *Daily News* argues that for Assange "blackmail, conspiracy, even manslaughter would be well-deserved".

To Goodwin from the *New York Post,* Bradley Manning is the "traitor", who "betrayed his nation in a time of war". Likewise, his colleague Podhoretz argues that Manning is "the only true evil American". In newspapers such as in the *New York Post,* some even favour the idea of designating "WikiLeaks as a terrorist organization". Even in well-established newspapers such as the *Washington Post,* references to terrorism are made. Thiessen, for example, proposes to establish a "coalition of the willing" against WikiLeaks. He argues that

> "just as terrorism allows small groups of individuals to wreak destruction on a scale that was once the province of nation-states, information technology allows small actors such as Julian Assange to wreak previously unimagined destruction on U.S. national security through cyberspace. This is a threat that requires a U.S. response. Hillary Clinton is right - WikiLeaks has attacked America. The only question is: Will America return fire?"

A variety of consequences and consequential actions are envisioned in the national security frame, although not all of them are used in all texts. Most authors agree on the need to trial Manning and WikiLeaks, although opinions diverge on the practicalities.

All agree, explicitly or implicitly, that the leaks have diminished the effectiveness of U.S. diplomacy and constitute a threat to national security (e.g. Wilson, Freeman, Brooks, Cohen, McCarthy, Lowry, Phillips, Walser, Ashing, Foxman). As put in the *New York Post,* "How in the world can a great nation conduct a foreign policy when its most sensitive internal documents end up all over the internet?" Some authors emphasise in particular the threat to individual lives (e.g. Becker, Feffer, Womack). An extract from a text by Womack on the *Huffington Post* website deserves being quoted at some lengths here, because it explicitly values safety of individuals over transparency. Addressing WikiLeaks, Womack argues that

> "it seems that there is no such thing as a 'good lie' to fanatics who believe that all state secrets are bad on principle. They believe in transparency not as a means to just government but as an end itself. Why, to not publish the names of Afghan civilians aiding in the fight against the Taliban would have been so elitist, and Assange's right to feel cool surely trumps their right to, you know, live."

Concluding, it can be argued that the national security frame as formulated by the U.S. government finds strong resonance in the public debate. The differences to the public statement are small. Some articles have a stronger patriotic tone than the official statement. Also, the State Secretary has been keen to emphasise the fact that the cables

are not formal policy formulations but just single views, "digests" not always "totally accurate" and "raw, unvarnished". This has gone in line with an unwillingness to discuss content of the cables. In contrast, some authors using this frame in the media and the Internet have used the content of the cables to demonstrate the dangers caused for the USA. However, these differences do not alter how the core problem is defined or the views on consequential action.

Accountability – "Information is the Lifeblood of Democracy"

Accountability has been another key issue in the debate. It has been used to counter the national security frame, and was often accompanied by strong emphasis on the value of democracy and good governance. It was primarily used by the bloggers in our sample, most notably in the *Huffington Post,* although it can also be found in articles from the *Washington Post*. In fact, mostly rather liberal and progressive blogs (*Think Progress, Crooks and Liars* and the *Huffington Post)* advocate the use of the accountability frame whereas there is little, if any, evidence of its usage to be found in the conservatively-minded blogs (*The Foundry* and *Michelle Malkin*). Furthermore, the government unsurprisingly does not mention it at all, regardless of the fact that accountability was one of its main issues when promoting transparency in the election campaign. Due to the extensive employment in the *Huffington Post* and the notable promotion in the qualitative newspapers (the *New York Times, USA Today* and the *Washington Post),* we deem the frame to be sufficiently strong with respect to public impact and therefore worth considering.

Essential to the accountability frame is the idea that the public "has a right to know" (e.g. Palermo, Weiler, Quigley, Solomon, Ross). The frame portrays as the key problem that currently this right is denied by the government due to over-classification of documents. Authors criticise a "poor record of government openness" in general and the "absurd secrecy of the Obama administration" in particular (see Milbank). As a consequence, there is less accountability of officials and a higher likelihood of the government abusing its powers. In this regard, WikiLeaks provides a "cleansing light of openness" which helps to prevent possible abuse of political power (see Warren).

The over-classification of documents seems to many as if the government was intentionally lying to its citizens. As argued by Solomon, "in a democracy, people have the right to know what their government is actually doing. In a pseudo-democracy, a bunch of fairy tales from high places will do the trick". The revelations by WikiLeaks exposed this

"duplicity" and uncovered the "masquerade" of U.S. diplomacy (see Solomon). He further observes that

> "details of Washington's transactional alliances with murderous dictators, corrupt tyrants, war lords and drug traffickers are among its most closely guarded quasi-secrets. Most media accounts can be blown-off by the officialdom, but smoking-gun diplomatic cables are harder to ignore."

In addition, some authors point to hypocrisy in the State Department which, on the one hand, seems to foster Internet freedom initiatives and press freedom in other regions of the world (such as the Middle East) while on the other hand proclaiming the possible alteration of the First Amendment in order to punish Julian Assange. In doing so, the freedom of American press seems to be in danger of constraint and less freedom of press induces less accountability of officials (e.g. Goldsmith, Huffington, Miller, Ross).

As already indicated above, main aspects in the accountability frame are democracy and good governance. They are described as a product of transparency (see Moore). In fact, transparency, free speech and accountability are key words which are used various times. They are seen as the "most fundamental values that underpin democracy" and thus, essential for good government (see Ross, and cf. Quigley, Howard). A quote from Quigley demonstrates this well:

> "By labelling tens of millions of documents secret, the US government has created a huge vacuum of information. But information is the lifeblood of democracy. Information about government contributes to a healthy democracy. Transparency and accountability are essential elements of good government. Likewise, a 'lack of government transparency and accountability undermines democracy and gives rise to cynicism and mistrust."

Some authors underscore their argumentation with references to Thomas Jefferson: "Information is the currency of democracy". The employment of a quote from Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the USA, aims to award credibility to the frame (cited in Quigley).

Many authors perceive the strong reactions of promoting Assange as a criminal as outrageous. Mull warns that we should "think twice before defining wikileaks and transparency and accountability as some kind of war on state secrecy". Solomon further questions "what kind of national security can be build on duplicity from a government that is discredited and refuted by its own documents?" (see Solomon). Further, they strongly rally against what they perceive as the dominant perspective of perceiving WikiLeaks as a challenge to national security:

"The US media and Congress have been blasting WikiLeaks for "treason" or "terrorism", and demanding it be silenced [...]. US media and Congress seem to have forgotten about free speech. Or the right of Americans to know what their government is really up to around the globe."

The question arises as to what extent the accountability frame is in accordance with WikiLeaks' notion of transparency. As described above, WikiLeaks wanted to expose the hypocrisy of the U.S. government with the cables. Its arguments thus contain elements of accountability. We find these ideas reflected in some statements, such as when authors argue that "the recent mega-leaks are especially jarring because of the extreme contrasts between the U.S. government's public pretences and real-life actions" (see Solomon). At the same time, authors often criticise WikiLeaks for its methods. However, although the methods are deemed controversial, the leaks made aware of the existing "information vacuum" and, at the same time, contributed to its dissolution (e.g. Weiler, Quigley). In this sense, by revealing information, WikiLeaks "at least is doing part of what America's elected leaders and supposed free media should have been doing: telling citizens what's really going on" (see Margolis). In other words, WikiLeaks documents "truths that must be learned" albeit it admittedly offers only a partial account of reality (see Levine).

In summary, the accountability frame provides the following picture of the diplomatic cables incidence. The U.S. government keeps too many secrets and classifies information which mostly does not need to be confidential. In doing so, it denies the American people its right to information and its right to know. Since information is seen as a public good, the absence of it leads to less accountability and distrust. As a result, less transparency provokes less accountability leading to less democracy. Therefore, the "government should be transparent by default and secret only by necessity" (see Jarvis).

Mediated Transparency – "WikiDump"

In the following, we elaborate on another frame which we have identified during the analysis of our empirical material. It concerns the need to appropriately mediate transparency in order for it to be understandable and useful. In other words, information not only needs to be made accessible for the masses, but it is also essential to put it in a comprehensive context. In this sense, when unredacted, more information does not automatically increase transparency, but rather leads to an information overload. Consequently, this overload leads to people being less informed because they do not have the time to filter the information or simply do not care.

In general, the mediated transparency frame was used prominently by press news. Within the group of newspapers, we observed the tendency that it was employed more frequently by the newspapers classified as quality newspapers (*Washington Post, USA Today* and *New York Times)* rather than those categorised as being sensationalist (*New York Daily News* and *New York Post)*. Concerning the blogger sphere, we could not identify any remarkable trend with regard to the usage of the frame. In this regard, we attribute the fact that the frame appeared more often in the *Huffington Post* to the comparatively higher amount of empirical material of this blog.

When examining the public debate on the diplomatic cables, it becomes evident that the published information alone is considered irrelevant without a contextualisation. The revelations are compared to a sudden information dump ("WikiDump", see Becker, and cf. Herman, Feffer) without any elevated value for the society. Milbank from the *Washington Post,* for instance, observes that

> "Assange's indiscriminate dump of American government secrets over the last several months - with hardly a care for who might be hurt or what public good was served - can be summarized nicely by a line from Wilde's play "A Woman of No Importance": Nothing succeeds like excess."

The diplomatic cables as such were assessed to be merely "gossip" and of a trivial nature and, explicitly stated, not facts (e.g. Applebaum, Milbank, Yglesias). This underscores the main argument enhanced by the frame, namely that quantity of information does not equal quality of the released information. Hence, nominal transparency does not necessarily lead to effective transparency (Heald, 2006). In case of "enigmatic lumps of information" (see Applebaum) such as the revelations by WikiLeaks, the public finds it exposed to "disinformation" and trapped in an "illusion of knowledge" (see Adnan). Applebaum from the *Washington Post* adds that "'Leaks' out of context have no significance."

Naturally advocated mainly by journalists, the frame emphasises the role of the traditional media as a gatekeeper of information. This role being challenged by WikiLeaks ("the new kid on the block", see Mitchell), their arguments stress the importance of investigative and qualitative journalism in contrast to the newly emerging "asymmetric journalism" à la WikiLeaks (see Howard). The frame characterises the latter as a "journalistic jujitsu" (see Carr) publishing information at any cost and presenting a "counter-culture" to traditional watchdog journalism (see Shane). In other words, the frame contrasts the moral behaviour of journalists acting in the public's interest to the arguably indiscriminate information dumping of WikiLeaks regardless possible negative consequences for individuals ("collateral damage", see Becker) (e.g. Raasch, Rivkin & Brown, Brooks, Cupp). Brooks from the *New York Times* puts it like this: "For him [Assange],

it's easy. But for everyone else, it's hard. My colleagues on the news side of this newspaper do not share Assange's mentality."

Interestingly, what is not being mentioned is the fact that during the period of our analysis only a small amount of the quarter million diplomatic cables had been released yet. Furthermore, all published cables had previously been sent to several major news outlets around the world (*New York Times* (USA), *Der Spiegel* (Germany), *The Guardian* (UK), *El País* (Spain) and *Le Monde* (France)). In this respect, they presumably had been investigated and redacted extensively before their publication in accordance with the journalistic expertise referred to above. As a result, the cables indeed had been put in a larger context, at least in the press news. As this aspect cannot be found in the frame on mediated transparency, we assume that it must have been kept silent on purpose.

Discussion

Many scholars have argued that the 20th century has led to a drive for transparency, triggered by emerging technologies, democratisation and globalisation (e.g. Lord, 2003). There has been both an increase in the availability of information, as well as an increase in the demand for transparency from civil society. The number of democracies characterised by free speech has risen since the fall of the Soviet Union, media have an increasingly global spread featuring news 24-hours each day, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have grown in number pressuring for accountability, and international requirements for information disclosure have increased (Lord, 2003, p. 131).

According to Florini (2002), we globally witness a "rapidly evolving shift of consensus" on the degree of transparency in opposition to secrecy. Accordingly, this "shift is occurring between old ideas of sovereignty, which allowed states to keep the world out of their domestic matters, and a new standard that they must explain their actions to the world" (pp. 13-14). Her essay is thus provocatively titled as "the end of secrecy". Our findings, however, suggest that we witness a reverse trend in U.S. public opinion demonstrated by the reactions to WikiLeaks. From the three frames discussed above, our findings show that national security has proven by far most dominant in the debate on the leaking of the diplomatic cables. Mediated transparency ranks second in prominence, while accountability is evoked very little, and mainly by bloggers on the *Huffington Post*.

Furthermore, official statements from 2011 suggest that the government could maintain its line without being pressured into shifting course. It seems to have been highly successful to frame WikiLeaks in light of national security in the public debate. A speech of Hillary Clinton held in February 2011 reflects this because the themes first spelled out

by Clinton on November 30, 2010 reappear. Like in the statement from November, Clinton still classifies the leaks as illegal, a "theft; [...] just the same as if they had been smuggled out in a briefcase." Further, there is a strong emphasis on confidentiality as an exception to transparency. Clinton argues in this sense that

> "The United States could neither provide for [...] citizens' security nor promote the cause of human rights and democracy around the world if we had to make public every step of our efforts. Confidential communication gives our government the opportunity to do the work that could not be done otherwise."

At the same time, it is interesting to note that a speech by the Secretary of State on Internet freedom and security at Washington University some months after the cables' release cannot do without mentioning WikiLeaks. The government seems to perceive the need to position itself vis-à-vis the WikiLeaks phenomenon and emphasise its own efforts at transparency. Clinton states that "governments also have a duty to be transparent. We govern with the consent of the people, and that consent must be informed to be meaningful". Nevertheless, the speech as a whole demonstrates that WikiLeaks is used to justify the limits to governmental transparency, and some secrecy is justified. Hence, the following question arises: How is it possible that a call for transparency has been turned into legitimising secrecy in political and diplomatic conduct?

In line with the quote of Nowotny (2011), we believe that the line between publicity and secrecy can be continuously reinvented. In our view, the WikiLeaks debate may interpreted as demonstrating the reinvention of secrecy in the U.S public sphere. The national security frame served as a justification to institute this shift. The U.S. government was able to implement its frame on a large scale, as is also demonstrated by consequential action taken by various actors from civil society. U.S. university students were encouraged not to read WikiLeaks, and not to publish any information from or about it on social network sites. U.S. bureaucrats were officially forbidden to access the WikiLeaks website. The website itself was the target of a a denial-of-service (DoS) attack. Furthermore, "several financial institutions, including Swiss PostFinance, PayPal, Bank of America, Visa and MasterCard, closed WikiLeaks' accounts shortly after the cables were published" (Karhula, 2011, p. 2). Even the support of transparency advocates started to become more critical. Steven Aftergood, for example, the director of Federation of American Scientists Project on Government Secrecy, strongly opposed the release of the cables, arguing that "some secrecy is perfectly legitimate and desirable" (cited by Karhula, 2011, p. 5), somewhat echoing the national security frame. The concepts of "sponsor activities", "cultural resonance" and "media practices" first introduced by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) can be used to shed light on this paradox.

Sponsor Activities

The idea that sponsor activities increase the popularity of frames is very straightforward. It implies that powerful actors sponsor a frame with their resources, for instance their expertise, the provision of a platform for it or the supply of financial means. It helps to understand the prominence of the national security frame, in that the frame was supported by the government, bloggers as well as the media, which provided it with a strong rhetorical power. The State Secretary was able to claim strong expertise in the conduct of diplomacy, and her view was supported by diplomats around the world, as well as foreign policy experts on platforms such as the *Huffington Post*.

The sponsors of the accountability frame were outnumbered by the government and its experts. The U.S. movement for transparency, and accountability, only developed recently in form of grass-root activism (see Sifry, 2011). It has been supported by hackers, bloggers and public policy advocates. Apart from them, the Obama administration promoted accountability in the early stages of its administration, but for obvious reasons refrained from using arguments of accountability in the WikiLeaks context. As a result, sponsor activities concerning accountability unsurprisingly were mainly conducted by individual activists from the blogger scene. Arguably, their standing in the debate, however, was limited by association with WikiLeaks and fear of evil "hacktivists" and "cybersecurity" (e.g. Hwang, *Washington Post*). Moreover, some transparency advocates, such as Steven Aftergood mentioned above, turned against WikiLeaks when the government idea won over that the release of the cables may do more damage than good.

Mediated transparency was sponsored by a wide range of journalists. They supported the ideas that transparency needs context with their own expertise and work. While WikiLeaks in fact published the cables in newspapers, cooperating with journalists and claimed on its website to put a lot of effort into contextualising the classified documents – this aspect of the debate was widely silenced due to the power of journalists to determine on a very large scale what is being said.

Cultural Resonance

The question why the national security frame appealed in that strong manner as it did to U.S. journalists and bloggers can further be clarified by looking at the cultural resonance of national security framing in the USA. A strong cultural resonance is advantageous for a frame as it then seems to resonate with larger cultural themes making it easier to appeal to (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 5).

According to Roberts (2006), the "assumption that the defence of national security demands strict controls on the flow of information is deeply embedded in bureaucratic – and popular – culture" (p. 42), hence the U.S. security establishment "enjoys a special level of protection against demands for openness" (ibid., p. 35). Traditionally, security agencies

have been excluded from demands for more transparency. The Freedom of Information Act, introduced in 1966, for example, grants material produced by four intelligence agencies, the CIA, the National Reconnaissance Office, the National Imagery and Mapping Agency and the National Security Agency an exclusive status, so that it can not be scrutinised by the public (ibid.). During the Cold War in particular, security arguments served to legitimise secrecy. The security establishment, as argued by Roberts (2006), was transformed into "an enclave of secrecy – a realm in which the usual logic of transparency (a calculus of the benefits and risks of openness) did not apply" (p. 33). Instead, "security was an absolute triumph over any demand for openness" (ibid.). While the dissolution of the Soviet Union produced global claims for more transparency, the security establishment in the USA proved "resilient" to these demands (ibid.).

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 further increased the authority of national security in public discourse. In reaction to the attacks, the government introduced more strict security measures. The CIA, for instance, was allowed to run "its own network of secret detention facilities, as well as a secret program to seize suspected terrorists covertly from other nations" (Roberts, 2006, p. 37). Furthermore, the government restricted public access to information what they labelled as "critical infrastructure" (e.g. nuclear plants, pipelines, etc.) that could potentially be attacked by terrorists. It also restricted public information on the inspection work of federal agencies (e.g. security checks on airports, shipping containers, safety checks nuclear plants) (ibid., pp. 37-38). Generally, commentators agree on the Bush administration's strong emphasis of the need for secrecy (see Birchall, 2011, p. 135). Accordingly, "Bush often appealed to national security to justify and legitimize state secrecy" (ibid.). This suggests that a fertile ground for national security, and against transparency, was provided by the Bush administration prior to WikiLeaks.

Another element in the national security frame used against WikiLeaks is the need for secrecy in diplomacy. This argument, too, has long enjoyed prominence in the USA. A common "wisdom" among diplomacy scholars is that "diplomacy must always be confidential if it seeks to be successful" and that "secrecy in diplomacy is a necessity" (Page & Spence, 2011, p. 234). Secret negotiations, in this view, enable "concessions" and "rapprochement" without losing face to the national public (ibid., p. 236). Furthermore, "sound diplomatic practice is dependent on mutual confidence which is built on integrity, discretion, moderation, intelligence and tact" and the "publication of confidential material violates that trust and decreased the other party's confidence" (ibid., p. 238). This view has rarely been challenged, apart from Woodrow Wilson's attempt to establish "open covenants openly arrived at" after World War One. He was later criticised for still keeping some negotiations secret, viewed by many as the official acknowledgement of the failure of transparency in diplomatic conduct (ibid.).

A prominent figure who famously established secret negotiations as a hallmark of

his diplomacy was Henry Kissinger (1923-) (Otte, 2001b). In Kissinger's eyes "secrecy and confidentiality allow the parties involved to negotiate on the basis of reciprocity without being subjected to domestic pressures" (ibid., p. 198). During his time as foreign minister, Kissinger practised what he taught. He made extensive use of "extra-bureaucratic envoys" and maintained a complex "shadow bureaucracy" bypassing the State Department. These became known as "backchannels" used by him to contact foreign leaders unconstrained by bureaucratic processes (ibid., p. 200). Due to these practices, Kissinger has been perceived as "taking traditional diplomatic secrecy to extremes" (ibid., p. 203). Given that Kissinger and others strongly promoted and established legitimacy for secrecy in diplomatic conduct, many scholars question the impact of WikiLeaks on diplomacy. Page and Spencer (2011), for example, believe that "scandals come and scandals go, but the diplomatic method will endure" (p. 235). Concluding from the above, we may say that secrecy as a pre-requisite to national security and diplomatic conduct is well-established in the U.S.'s cultural repertoire and hence helps to understand the strong resonance of the frame in the WikiLeaks debate.

Arguably, accountability enjoys less cultural resonance in the USA although the idea dates back to the 19th century. Back then, the view that public institutions should "record their actions and to grant access to these records" (Stalder, 2011, p. 9) developed and transparency was perceived as "a key element of the functioning of the institutional system of checks and balances" (ibid.). It was viewed as a mechanism "to hold those inside these institutions – that is, those in power, accountable to those outside whom they are supposed to serve" (ibid., p. 22).

In contrast, the U.S. movement for transparency, and accountability, only developed recently. Slowly, technologists and public interest advocates "began to understand the power of open standards for sharing data" (Sifry, 2011, p. 69) and started to perceive the Internet as a platform for information exchange. They came to realise the difficulties invested in accessing government documents, and started to develop programs to improve this. Inspired by technologists, public interest advocates founded the Sunlight Foundation in 2006, "the first Washington-based non-profit dedicated to using technology and the Internet to open up government" (ibid., p. 72). Together, public interest advocates and Internet activists developed programs such as 'Congresspedia', "a wiki anyone could edit focused on members of Congress and their work", 'MapLight', "a research tool for exploring possible correlations between campaign contributions and legislative votes" and 'OpenCongress', "a unified hub that enables users to track members, bills, votes and issues" (ibid., p. 73). This initial grass-root activism successfully pressured, for example, the Federal Accountability and Transparency Act in 2006, which requires full disclosure

to the public of all entities or organisations receiving federal funds. Notably, however, accountability campaigns in the U.S. had not yet targeted foreign relations and diplomacy as an area in which more transparency is needed – thus no fertile ground was established previous to the revelations.

As already indicated, the activists' demands were also incorporated by Obama, exemplified by the following statement: "I am a big believer in technology and I'm a big believer in openness when it comes to the flow of information. I think that the more freely information flows, the stronger society becomes, because then citizens of countries around the world can hold their own governments accountable" (cited in Sifry, 2011, p. 136). However, according to transparency proponent Sifry (2011), this may be interpreted as "a kind of bloodless embrace, a rhetorical gesture to changing culture without any real content and certainly no loss of control" (p. 137) and as a tool "to consolidate their power, not to empower others for any other purpose" (p. 138). It has, nonetheless, given the government the credibility that they generally promote accountability. Arguably, this gave them more rhetoric power, rather than less, when WikiLeaks published its cables. They promoted the national security frame, while being able to maintain that, in general, apart from the exception of national security and the lives of individuals, they are true believers in the need for accountability in government.

Media Practices

Media practices is a concept which suggests that journalist norms and practices affect the selection of frames, thereby giving them more weight in the debate. Firstly, this can help to explain the prominence of the mediated transparency frame. Arguably, journalists felt threatened by WikiLeaks as a challenger to their role as gatekeepers to, and interpreters of information. They thus continuously emphasised the importance of traditional investigative journalism and the need to contextualise information by putting it in a larger context

Moreover, media practices shed light on the the fact that the national security frame of the government was so widely applied by U.S. journalists. Research has shown that U.S. media are often bound by "operational bias" favouring government insiders for their political expertise. This practice often results in "strong emphasis on government officials" (Schudson, 2008, p. 52). As Schudson (2008) puts it, "the media discourse in the United States fails to approximate an ideal of robust and wide open discussion" (ibid., p. 54). Other scholars have added that bias towards official representations is particularly strong in times of national crisis (Coe et al., 2004, p. 237). One reason for this is that "national unity is good business" (ibid.). This suggests that the national security frame also gained prominence because the media could sell it well. Schudson (2002) claims that national

security has always been an issue which brings media to align with politics in the United States. He argues that "journalists [...] reject neutrality during threats to national security. When they are convinced that national security is at risk they willingly withhold or temper their reports" (p. 41).

Lastly, media practices help to explain the strong secrecy-transparency binary that developed in the debate. As argued by Gamson and Modigliani (1989), media practices are often influenced by a "balance norm" suggesting that the official view should be countered by one opposing opinion, in this case, transparency. Furthermore, Coe et al. (2004) have conducted research into the phenomenon that U.S. media often work with binary constructions such as good versus evil and conclude that "a political leader can have high confidence that the press will echo a binary discourse" (p. 248). In the case of WikiLeaks, the national security frame contained a similar binary of 'the good diplomats' and 'the evil criminal Assange' who threatened U.S. national interests. Simplifying the debate in this way, their statements resonate with former president Bush's proclamation: 'you're either with us, or you are with the terrorists'. According to Coe et al. (2004), a binary construction is attractive to the media because it "feeds a sense of conflict, which is the heart of most political news coverage"; "provides rhetorical flourishes that new media outlets desire" and "has moral staying power" (p. 248).

Conclusion

Our chapter has investigated American public reactions to the release of classified U.S. diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks, in order to understand whether the whistle-blower organisation has influenced the perception of transparency in the USA. As stated in the introduction, we believe that new technologies alone will not make politics more transparent. They have to be accompanied by a desire and willingness of the public for higher levels of transparency. Our findings suggest that this desire for more transparency has not been created in the United States. Using framing analysis, we have found that WikiLeaks has paradoxically led to more, rather than less support for secrecy in foreign relations and diplomacy.

We identified three dominant frames in discussions surrounding transparency on WikiLeaks from November 2010 to February 2011: national security, accountability and mediated transparency. The national security frame was first promoted by the government in an attempt to portray the leaks as a danger to international peace and national security, as well as risking the lives of brave individuals. This frame was picked up among a wide array of journalists and bloggers. It may as such be perceived as the counter-narrative to

WikiLeaks attempt of challenging secrecy in the United States' government. The national security frame was opposed by a group of bloggers, and public policy advocates that used e.g. the *Huffington Post* as a platform to promote the need for greater accountability. They defined as the 'real' problem that the government was keeping too many documents secret. Apart from the strong conflict between the first two frames, mediated transparency has no direct opposing frame. It was often used to accompany the national security frame.

We have found tentative suggestions as to why the national security frame enjoyed greatest prominence by using the concepts of sponsor activities, cultural resonance and media practices. These concepts help to understand that national security resonates well with previous cultural themes, that the frame has further been promoted by powerful sponsors while other actors promoting accountability became more critical or were discredited, and that media practices help to explain why journalists advertised mediated transparency.

Our analysis further demonstrates a strong tendency to emphasise either national security and justify secrecy, or highlight accountability and promote transparency. We thus observed a pattern to view secrecy and transparency as binary terms. As argued by Birchall (2011), "most commentaries on state secrecy or transparency set up the choice between these two poles as clear" (p. 141). Our findings support this claim. They align with previous research on media practices in the United States. In a study on the rhetoric of George Bush to justify the Iraq War, for example, Coe et al. (2004) argue that "binary constructions are ideally suited for a U.S. political culture dominated by mass media; that is, binaries well fit the dominant norms of news construction" (p. 234).

Binary rhetorical construction, however, seems to have simplified the debate in the United States and helped to support the victory of national security (and thus secrecy) over accountability (transparency). Only few authors from the material we collected actually evaluated the impact of the cables release or offered a view that was difficult to arrange at either of the poles. This led to a loaded debate in which the rhetoric of 'a nation at war' whose international actions are severely damaged by the leaks, won over questioning the worth of the cables, and whether they actually did or did not need classification. Thus, public opinion surrounding transparency developed to be considerably biased towards a reinforcement of political and diplomatic confidentiality despite arguments that a high degree of secrecy in national security can also prove to be problematic. As noted by Steven Aftergood (2009), often "genuine national security secrecy is diluted in an ocean of unnecessary bureaucratic secrets and defamed from time to time by abuse in the form of political secrecy" (cited in Birchall, 2011, p. 137).

Further research is essential in evaluating the long-term effect of modern information leaking possibilities on the norm of transparency. As of now, it seems that WikiLeaks has not managed to increase the desire of more transparency in U.S. politics. Possibly, however,

the information provided by the leaks will lead to stronger concerns after they have been studied in depth among scholars and intellectuals. At the same time, our research suggests that as long as the United States is involved in a variety of wars internationally, the national security rhetoric can still be powerful. At the moment, the prospects for stronger demands of transparency in U.S. diplomacy are dim.

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