

◆ **How WikiLeaks will transform mainstream media**

Presentation by Kristinn Hrafnsson, WikiLeaks spokesperson and investigative journalist

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Convener: Mr Peter Fray, Managing Editor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*.



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Peter Fray: Ladies and gentlemen, scholars, friends and colleagues. It has become somewhat fashionable to characterise an issue as the greatest moral challenge of our time. Experience to date suggests the use of such an absolute is fraught: that one person's great moral challenge, even if mandated by a prime minister, can and will be challenged, picked apart and ultimately traduced in the absence of consensus or the presence of vehement and well organised oppositional forces.

It is for that reason I temper my language – one of the many great moral challenges of our time is whether or not we should trust government? That, I think, is the core question posed by WikiLeaks and its mediation into the public space of government 'owned' secrets. It is one our speaker tonight, Kristinn Hrafnsson, a spokesman for WikiLeaks, addresses on a daily basis and why this evening's talk is so important, in terms of both timing and content.

Journalists love leaks. They are thrilling and they are necessary. They assist us to fulfill the unwritten, unspoken and often unexamined contract between the media and the public: in essence, that journalists work in the interests of the public to shine a light on the truth and in doing so, without fear or favour, make those in power more accountable for their actions and decisions. Sometimes, such exposure changes policy and outcomes; in the journalists' mind, these changes are always for the better – especially at the point of publication.

Every journalist who receives a leak will balance up the potential of the information leaked – its capacity to foster or provoke change – with the more vexed question – the motivation of the leaker. Eight, maybe, nine times out of ten this question will be decided in favour of the leaker. The leaked information once appropriate checks and related issues – such as the opportunity for a rebuttal – are dealt with.

The urge to publish is strong and difficult to deny. But from time to time, the leaked information will never see the light of the day or may remain in an editor's waiting room as issues of accuracy or motivation are dealt with.

And there are a lot of grey areas out there: political 'smears', for instance, are often dressed up as leaks, the source playing up to the journalistic vanity of getting a good yarn and letting the public know about some indiscretion which means so and so is no longer fit to hold office. Or they may be part of a political strategy to gradually erode public confidence in an MP or organisation and their decision-making abilities. These allegations can – and often should – reach the public arena, sometimes in a mediated or qualified form.

Often they do not. I recently knocked back information that sought to prove the partner of a very well known politician had broken certain business regulations. The story, even if true, was not to my mind in the interest of public.

Editing is a process replete with human failings and bias, I would have to admit, but imperfect as editors may be there are ethical standards and guidelines. With due deference to the Press Council, we are largely a self regulated mob – but our practices and approaches are honed over decades of practice and experience.

The same, I'm afraid, can't always be said of those who wear the mantle of the journalist in the new media space – where every one can claim to be a journalist and/or an editor or publisher. WikiLeaks brings these issues – and many more related ones -- into sharp relief and then takes the whole question of secrecy and its exposure to another level. Its contribution to free speech is undeniable. For that it should be applauded and lauded.

As editor when the Herald first published Wiki's Australian-related cables – and now editor-in-chief and publisher – I have no qualms about defending the publication of the documents it has obtained in the interests of freedom of speech and in the public interest. But that said, how we define that public interest, how we distinguish between the interests of different publics and groups, is as important as ever.

There is also no denying that WikiLeaks has helped protect journalistic sources – better than we can in the absence of shield laws that work in every state and jurisdiction – and exposed the abuse of power by governments around the world.

But is there a limit? I accept that WikiLeaks does not hack, but it is fair to say it endorses the hackers' desire to expose and share – everything. By publishing WikiLeaks am I agreeing with the view that government is a conspiracy and that only by exposing its inner workings – all the speculation, opinions, chats, theories and personal views – will it ever better serve the public interest?

Is all government a conspiracy, populated and prosecuted by an elite class of bureaucrats and politicians solely motivated by the exercise of power and their own reflection in its mirror? I am deeply perplexed by this question, as, among many others things, it goes to the very heart of the way political journalism is practiced in this and most other Western democracies.

I have spoken to many MPs about WikiLeaks but one conversation with a senior political identity, whose name I won't share, has stuck in my mind. He was named in a WikiLeaks cable published by the Herald and was none too impressed to be so. He first raised the idea that we had somehow defamed him – we had not – but his real argument was more subtle. As he noted, he had been a real and valuable source for many journalists over the years, a constant wellspring of deep and important background briefings. These briefings had always been conducted under the conditions of an unwritten pact – the sort of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" which fuels the world of political journalism go round.

My MP saw this as part of his function in life – to provide insight in to the workings of government and party, alike – but felt disinclined to do since we had so badly treated him. He threatened to cut off the flow of information.

Now, as you'd appreciate, the idea of a polle threatening a journo for going too far – or not far enough -- is nothing new and neither is the idea that even the most-frosty relationships eventually thaw. It is called mutual self-interest. But the rawness of the information contained in WikiLeaks – and its somewhat wild, personal and uncontrollable nature – proved a real threat to the relationship between journalist and MP.

That WikiLeaks' is a threat to this cosy relationship is, perhaps, a good thing – but it is not one without consequence and not just for the closeted world of political journalism. The questions for me are thus: would we have more secrecy – rather than less – if all the workings of the machinery of government can be exposed? And if so, would this make the job of journalism that much harder and provoke my profession to take even greater and greater risks – and to potentially cross the line between public and private – in the name of doing its

job?

There are no easy answers. And in many ways, the jury is still out. But that is why I am delighted that Kirstin is here with us this evening. Whether he is here as witness for the prosecution or defence, is up to you to decide – and, hopefully, discuss with him after his talk.

Ladies and gentlemen I give you Kristinn Hrafnsson.

Kristinn Hrafnsson

Thank you. Thank you for inviting me here. This is my first time to Australia and my first serious experience with jetlag as well. When I arrived here, I came out of the terminal, it was windy, it was raining; it was about fourteen degrees Celsius. There was an ice cloud high in the sky so I felt just like home on a good Icelandic summer day.

So, I'll probably get over the jetlag pretty quickly. I will speak about WikiLeaks in general. The most recent and high profile projects that we've been working on. Our relations with the media and some thoughts on the possible impact the organisation has had on journalism and afterwards I'll be happy to take your questions.

Let me begin with a few words on secrecy. A few days ago, a story broke that some hackers had broken into the computers of the international monetary fund, the IMF and gotten access to some unspecified data.

Most news stories have seen on this our symbol. They outline the gravity of this incident. Some reports claim that the data might be politically explosive, and in this report, in the English Independent, it was claimed that the IMF had become "the latest and potentially the most serious victim of attack by computer hackers." *The Independent* claims that this grave incident has caused concerns that sensitive information about the finances of governments might have fallen into the wrong hands.

And when I read this I thought hang on, what can possibly be sensitive about finances of governments? What can possibly be sensitive about macro-economic data pertaining to a state? What possible harm can be caused if this information is, well for example, available to everybody? We all know that the IMF is only called in when governments need a bailout. The IMF implements programs of austerity measures, privatisation, selling of state assets, tax hikes, cuts in spending, etc. When the IMF is called in, everyone knows that the country is in deep trouble and that's not a secret.

But how on earth can information on the extent of the problem and the measures taken to counter the trouble be a secret? My own country for example, Iceland, was in such terrible trouble after a near economic meltdown in the Fall of 2008 that the government had to ask the IMF to help out.

Now this is very controversial in Iceland and it still is debated and to tell you the truth I don't see whatever in the relations between the IMF and the Icelandic government needs to be a secret. And I as a citizen and a taxpayer in Iceland, I feel a need to have a full account of all the information for responding to measures taken by my government and the IMF. Nothing in the relations between these entities is in the [inaudible] business category and in my opinion the same applies to the citizens in Greece and all other countries that have dealings with the IMF.

It is their fundamental democratic right. In one news story I read, one reason for the supposed seriousness of this incident was that the sensitive correspondence between the IMF staff and state leaders could be very damaging. But what on earth can be damaging – would that be an email from the Prime Minister of Greece to Strauss-Kahn, that former head of the IMF?

And how would that even read? I mean what could be sensitive there? Would it be "Dear Dominique, thank you for visiting our country, I hope you enjoyed our hospitality and our hotel staff"? Let's be serious. What on earth can be there that is sensitive between those two entities?

I've seen quite a few articles on this story and I'm amazed by the fact that I've not seen a single one that critically asks the fundamental question – why the need for secrecy? And even the left wing *Independent* fails to ask this question.

The reason is probably the fact that we have become so accustomed to the norm of secrecy – secrecy in governments and secrecy by other holders of powers, big international corporations that are more powerful than many states – secrecy has become the norm instead of being a rare exception.

This secrecy trend has escalated in recent time, all under the assumption that it is totally necessary for us, the citizens, to be kept ignorant; necessary for our own security. But we at WikiLeaks disagree. We believe it is fundamental in a democratic society that citizens have access to all relevant information that they need to make an informed decision. If we the people do not have this access, democracy is flawed and we know that power is abused. The more secrecy we have, the greater the danger is of abuse.

A few words on WikiLeaks – it's an organisation founded by your Julian Assange, as you all know, back in 2006, and before the turbulent chapter in its history that started about fourteen months ago, WikiLeaks had published information from many countries, often uncovering corruption. These were material pertaining to the Kenyan Government, the Church of Scientology, the failed Icelandic banks, the Bank of Julius Baer, toxic waste dumping in the Ivory Coast and the list goes on.

Despite the importance of this information and its revelations, the revelations went relatively unnoticed. This of course changed when we started publishing material pertaining to the US military and the US State Department.

And then subsequently, WikiLeaks was criticised for being anti-American and overly focused on the United States, but nothing is further from the truth. WikiLeaks does not pick targets; it is a passive recipient of material that whistleblowers can submit securely and anonymously.

Today we have about 15 or 20 people on the payroll. I don't have the accurate number as some are working on a short-term basis and others on a long term contract so this varies. So, it's a small organization ... about the supposed lack of transparency in the organisation and critics point out that people who work for WikiLeaks are not known.

A few of us who work for the organisation are known but that is true, that the identity of most is protected. It would probably be different if we were working in a different climate, but in light of the current attacks, we consider it essential to protect our people.

And if you think about the heated words that have been uttered where prominent figures have even called for the assassination of the core staff including Julian Assange, I believe we are justified in this approach. Even Sarah Palin, who could become the next president of the United States, God help us, said that Julian should be hunted like Osama Bin Laden and we all know now what that means.

But in addition to the core group of staff, we have the volunteers that contribute some almost full time to the organisation and very many can be called in to help part time when needed.

Yes critics have said quite a lot about the apparent murkiness of our finances but they haven't bothered to visit the website of the Wau Holland Foundation a German charity that handled most of our donations and finances. On their website you can find detailed information about our finances for 2010, donations and reimbursement of cost.

A few legal entities have been established in various countries, for example Iceland, that are taking part in the WikiLeaks project, or hopefully will be in the future. WikiLeaks is a publisher, often described as the publisher of last resort. Some claim that it is impossible to keep the organisation accountable. That is not entirely correct. WikiLeaks has in the past had to face legal challenges and always won.

We have criticism that we don't abide by any code of ethics. Well I personally as a journalist and a member of the Icelandic Federation of Journalists and I believe Julian is also a member of Australian Journalist Association and is probably bound by its code of ethics. Also, WikiLeaks has had standards of harm minimisation in releasing information. It is in my opinion in line with what most media organisations abide by, or at least claim to abide by, and I think it's fair to say that most of us at WikiLeaks adhere to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The last year has been turbulent in the history of WikiLeaks, and it started with the release of secret military video on April 5th last year. It was released under the title of collateral murder and showed among other the killing of innocent civilians on July 12th 2007 in *Al-Amin* al-Thaniyah neighbourhoods in South-Eastern Baghdad.

In my opinion, exposing this video was of historic significance and has become a symbol of the war we never got to see in Iraq. It shows the real meaning of the term collateral damage. Two Reuters employees were killed in the attack and the news organisation was shown a part of the video. Reuters had been trying to get access to it ever since and had requested it under the US Freedom of Information Act.

Pentagon has stalled for years and obviously never intended to release it. The video is graphic and horrifying to watch. I felt as a journalist it was important to travel to Baghdad to gather initial information on the ground before the release of the video.

In a hasty trip, I managed to meet the families of those killed and the two young children who were the only ones to survive the attack – Saeed (phonetic) and Doa (phonetic). Their father Matasha Tomal was killed, his only crime was to stop his mini-van to try to help a wounded Reuters employee, Saeed Chmagh.

We offered this material – the interviews, the photographs, free of charge to any media who wanted it, and I have to admit I was quite surprised how little interest there was in the full story, in the human angle of those who testified about their loss and suffering because of this incident. Apart from a few TV stations in the West, who carried a small part of this material and a couple of newspapers who used our photos, the story focused on the leak itself, not necessarily, the story told.

And then instantly there was this massive focus on Julian himself. This was a revealing experience about the focus of the media and I ask myself if we had gotten accustomed to completely block out the human angle to the war – at least the Iraqi human angle.

Had we journalists become so complacent in the strategy of de-humanising the Iraqis, possibly see all of them as insurgents, the enemy. And it made me think of how appalling badly most Western journalists had been in reporting the Iraqi invasion and the war.

And of course this has to be seen in the context of the brilliant strategy of Pentagon of embedded journalism – those who were not embedded were almost considered legitimate targets and maybe they were legitimate targets – deliberate targets, excuse me.

A few days ago, I was in Spain. I was talking to the relatives of *José Couso*, a cameraman who was killed in April in 2003. He was standing on the balconies of the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, where hundreds of journalists were staying and everyone knew that this was their place, when a crew of an Abrams tanks took aim and shelled the fourteenth floor, killing *José* and a Ukrainian cameraman that was working for Reuters.

The family of Couso are still fighting for justice. José's brother told me they had produced a witness, a former US serviceman, who had overheard radio communication of the plan to attack the Palestine. He intervened and urgently warned all parties, but this was deliberately ignored and this is just one of many devastating attacks by the Western forces on journalists in Iraq – the deadliest war in recent history for journalists.

And this is possibly one reason very few journalists in Iraq go outside secure compounds and actually cover the story of the Iraqi people and their plight.

The experience of the collateral murder release prompted us to rethink media strategy. It seemed that the best way of getting good analysis of our material was to make alliances with established media and promise them some level of exclusivity.

And so we did in the next release and it caused quite a stir – the so-called Afghan war diary – the release of over 90,000 incident and intelligence reports from the Afghan war.

The release was in cooperation with three media partners – The Guardian, The New York Times and the German weekly Der Spiegel. Fifteen thousand of the logs were withheld in order to protect individuals who could be identified.

This was the biggest leak in US military to that date. It gave a detailed picture of the war from 2003 to 2010. It revealed also the kill and capture unit of special forces who were hunting and killing Taliban leaders without trial, how the use of drones was increasing, how the opposition in Afghanistan was escalating the resistance with roadside bombs, previously unreported civilian deaths – in short, it showed how the military venture in Afghanistan had been going from bad to worse over the years.

The invasion was a response for the 9/11 attacks, where more than 2,900 people were killed but to date, more than 2,500 foreign troops have been killed in Afghanistan and more than 30,000 civilians.

The Afghan war diary told a terrible story that we had not before had first hand evidence of – the story of a failed mission and just like the Soviets experienced before, there seems to be no victory to be had in this battered land.

I'm not an expert on Afghanistan, I have only been there twice, but element that I always feel is missing in our reporting from the country is the escalation of the poppy growth and heroin production. Ninety-five per cent of the heroin sold on Western streets originates from Afghanistan and according to the UN agencies, 10,000 people die every year of a heroin overdose in Western cities.

That is three times more than died on September 11th. With that in mind, I've always thought it almost surreal to see photos of Western troops wading through the poppy fields, trying to find the enemy in hiding. And keeping in mind as well, that at least some of the proceeds of the drug trade is financing the insurgency.

All went pretty well in the cooperation with the media partner last summer – the timidity of the Times came as a surprise to me though. It was obvious that they were genuinely uncomfortable with putting themselves in opposition to the government by publishing this material.

And for one, who I'd always thought that *The New York Times* was a powerhouse of journalism, this was the New York Times of the early seventies when the paper took on the Nixon administration by publishing the Pentagon Papers from Daniel Ellsberg and this was exactly forty years ago.

And I'm still not sure whether the paper was primarily afraid of repercussions or whether they simply did not want to upset a cosy relationship with Washington, and maybe it was a combination of both.

The New York Times did for example not want to be the first to publish the material online, even though as a matter of seconds, it was rather odd, as media organisations usually are fighting to be the first, fighting for the scoop.

We at WikiLeaks were delayed by a technical problem and this caused a great tension within the *New York Times*. They had their fingers on the go button but waited anxiously for WikiLeaks to publish first.

WikiLeaks' approach was to use these established media houses to get the message out, to get access to the dozens of quality journalists who analyse the vast material and mine stories out of it.

We considered this a co-operation on a base of equality. It was agreed that WikiLeaks had a great say in the strategy of the release as the organisation was obviously going to take the heat for the publication. But it slowly became apparent that *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* saw things differently, for Bill Keller, the editor of *The New York Times*, and David Lee at *The Guardian*, WikiLeaks was primarily a source. What was disturbing though, that those guys did not feel the same obligations towards their sources, as one is ethically supposed to do as journalists in my opinion. And this became apparent in September last year prior to the release of the Iraq warlogs.

We wanted to expand the media exposure and get broadcasters on board. Originally that was met with opposition as the three print media thought they had agreed to full exclusivity. But Julian had to remind them that exclusivity was limited to print.

We got the Bureau of Investigative Journalism on board as a producer of television programs for Al Jazeera and Channel 4 in the UK. The Swedish National Television also made their own program but worked in close proximity to the Bureau.

At a later stage, the French daily *Le Monde* came on board and also *El Pais* of Spain. This created a media co-operation on a scale never tried before. This was a historic leak but also a new chapter in media history. Never before had as many different news organisations cooperated on a single investigative project and this was not without problems. It was a great mistrust, fear that someone would break rank and go early, there was also a great reluctance to share findings and research as had been the original idea and everybody had agreed on.

The Germans at *Der Spiegel* were throughout very professional I must say – they shared great news stories that had been missed by others. In later August, early September it became obvious to us that we needed to postpone the release of the Iraq logs originally planned to be released in mid-September. The primary reason was that we were working on a complicated method of redacting sensitive material out of the logs.

The approach was rather unique as it entailed defining on the outset that all the information in the vast material would be considered harmful until proven otherwise. This can be called reverse process of redaction.

David Lee at *The Guardian* had for reasons of simplicity been given the role of an intermediary with *The New York Times* and *Der Spiegel*. David was against the delay and played a rather silly political game in trying to stop it.

All of this is of course not mentioned in his book about this project. There was even a threat to publish the stories without WikiLeaks being able to publish it was based upon at the same time – something was against our principles.

And Lee was not at all concerned at this time about the interests of his media partner WikiLeaks, or if he was to choose as to look at WikiLeaks as primarily source, he did not see any objections to compromising the source if it suited his interest. He even tried to play a game of poker by trying to convince me it was actually *The New York Times* and *Der Spiegel* who did not want to delay – a bluff that I called by simply contacting directly Bill Keller and the editors of *Der Spiegel*.

We later found out that *The New York Times* had been in much closer contact with the administration prior to the release that we had thought normal. This is not the kind of story that you need necessarily to give a right or reply.

I mean what was there to reply to? This was the publication of material pertaining from the Defence Department the facts – the facts of the Iraqi war as seen by the US military. The news headlines were quite extraordinary. The media partners had of course full editorial independence and the flavour of their reporting was different, but it was interesting though that all focused on the story that the Americans were fully aware that Al-Maliki government was torturing detainees and did nothing to stop this and even handed detainees over for torture.

I say that all focused on this angle with one notable exception – *The New York Times* decided to focus on the Iranian involvement in Iraq. Overall, this was a sensational release and a new chapter in media history as well as I previously mentioned. Keeping the media alliance together was quite a test, it was sometimes like herding cats, which is an Icelandic saying, I don't know if you know that here.

Everyone wanted to go their own way, not accustomed to work in alliance, and there was a great surprise the day after the first release when *The New York Times* decided to publish on its front page a profile on Julian, a profile that can only be described as a sleazy hit piece. Of course *The New York Times* was in full right to do a full critical report on Julian, but it was very negative and one-sided and giving the unusual prominence of the front page.

I say one-sided as the author David Burns the local London bureau chief did not get any input from those working closely with Julian, me included. So, we were at the same venue at least three times in a couple of weeks prior to the publication of this profile.

Instead he sought out the people who would obviously give negative comments on Julian and later Mr. Brisbane who is the public editor of the paper defended the profile but admitted that it was a way of inculcating the paper as he put it from government criticism, and I leave it to you to judge how honourable that is to attack the person who have given you access to sensational material in this manner.

And later David Lee at *The Guardian* did the same thing in his book, which is in my opinion most interesting for what is missing from it and in public speeches he has been calling Julian crazy, narcissistic, deranged and my favourite a dirty, flaky hacker from Melbourne. So beware, this is the way *The Guardian* treats its sources.

Of all the big leaks published by WikiLeaks in the last fourteen months, surely the one with the greatest impact is the release of the State Department cables pertaining from the US embassies and consulates all around the world. There are 250,000 of them, we call it the Cablegate Project and it started in late November last year. The release and media collaboration has been in two steps – firstly there was a first release by primary media partners, most of whom I've mentioned, and later we have been building an alliance with media in various countries where they get access to papers pertaining to their region.

In some countries we have made agreements with more than one news organisation and in others, the media environment is so untrustworthy that we had to rely on individual journalists, media from neighbouring countries, academics or research organisations. But slowly and gradually we are getting the information out as we promise our sources with more and more agreements of collaborations being assigned.

And all in all there are now more than 75 partners working on this material and the project is continuing. This collaboration has been, overall, very positive and effective as we are relying on local knowledge and local interests and expertise. This might be a slow process but we are a small organisation and we try to be as careful as possible.

We try to take care not to cause unnecessary harm to people. We have relied on the local, in-depth knowledge of our media partners and on their evaluation of what needs to be redacted – names and all that information that could be harmful.

We revised the evaluation of our media partners regularly and often we have reinstated information that they have decided to omit. Sometimes their evaluation has not met our standards and they have not been able to explain why they redacted certain things, and there are also cases where a news organisation had had to, has had to over-redact to protect themselves, for example for libel reasons.

I'm not going to dwell on individual important news stories, there are too many to pick from. Overall, it has shown that what the priorities are in US foreign policy and how it is carried

out, not always in the best of manners – often dodgy deals are made or even threats. The cables have made diplomatic relations more transparent. The cables have also brought to light the usual information from the host countries – useful and necessary for the people of these countries.

It has to be said that the US Embassy staff had been agile in their information gathering role and had been in a good position to analyse the internal politics and economics rather well in the countries they are operating in.

It has been suggested that the Cablegate could have a devastating effect on countries' relations, people would no longer be able to have confidential talks based on trust but I believe this is a hyped assumption and instead we will and have possibly already seen a more frank and open dialogue between state leaders and that is the way it should be. Last week for example, the US Defence Secretary Robert Gates was in Europe meeting partners in NATO – the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – and it made headlines that he openly and without any sugar coating harshly criticised the European partners for not pitching enough into the cooperation, and everybody knew that he was of course referring to Afghanistan.

And I wonder if he would have been as blunt openly in a world prior to WikiLeaks. The critics of WikiLeaks have as before been quick to denounce the importance of the cable release. This is nothing new, they have said, although our media partners disagree.

And try telling this to the Tunisians. When the Tunisian cables started to surface in early December, they were translated and disseminated to the public in Tunisia. Stories were made on their basis by Al Jazeera and all the news organisations. You didn't have to tell the Tunisians at that time that the Zine *El Abidine Ben Ali* government was corrupt. But the extent of their corruption, with detailed example was news to many. And maybe most importantly it was news that the outpost of the State Department knew exactly what kind of leader Ben Ali was but still it was supporting him as a useful ally.

The Tunisians did not like what they read and the reasons escalated the fury already in place in the country. It was the tragic death of a young IT graduate, *Mohammed al-Bouazizi*, who set himself on fire that tipped the balance. He died on January 4th and on January 14th Ben Ali and his family fled the country.

And the Tunisian example was an inspiration to the Egyptians. Information in Egyptian cables about internal matters of the country fanned the flames. There was a big demand for Hosni Mubarak to step down. The United States thought they could interfere by suggesting that Suleiman would replace president Mubarak, but cables showed that he had been responsible for the torture chambers in the country – did away with that possibility.

And the so-called "Arab Spring" has spread. Amnesty International has acknowledged WikiLeaks' role as a catalyst in the chain of events and dedicated a good part of the introduction in the last annual report to discuss the exciting possibilities of the Internet and information leaks. It concluded that last year might be remembered as a watershed year when activists and journalists used new technology to speak truth to power, and in so doing had pushed for greater respect for human rights.

I've not mentioned the release of the Guantanamo files, the reports on almost all the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, showing for example how appallingly bad information was used as a basis of years of imprisonment without trial and often information received through torture, leading to boys as young as fourteen and old men being imprisoned for years. And Guantanamo is surely a black stain of US history.

So, WikiLeaks has made an impact in our world. It has been a catalyst in the profound changes now happening in the Arab world. The leaks have deepened our understanding of the world we live in. It has excited the ordinary people who were losing hope in their government systems and the media. WikiLeaks has shown the traditional media that they were not doing the job properly in my opinion and needed to make amends after rather a bleak performance in the last decade or two. The idea WikiLeaks represents has sparked the imagination and hope of people who really believe in democracy. They see finally the possibilities of the aids of the Internet delivering a better life for more people through empowerment on the basis of information dissemination.

But so how has WikiLeaks changed the world of journalism? Let me give you a few examples. I think it has challenged the traditional media and in doing so has made journalists braver. Our work has reinvigorated journalists the world over to start ask the hard questions again. This is crucial because a free media is the watchdog of a free society. WikiLeaks has revolutionised the traditional media by partnering with more than seventy-five traditional newspapers and other media outlets. It has forged a new model for how the media can work together to collaboratively, not just in competition, for better reporting in the public interest.

I believe we have encouraged the spread of data journalism – sophisticated analysis or large scale data such as thousands of war logs to understand the bigger picture. Same sort of work an intelligence agency does, but the fruits are given to all the people of society, not locked in some hidden vault.

And WikiLeaks has enhanced the spread of new media. More than 20 new leak sites have sprung up in the wake of WikiLeaks, including Indoleaks, Balkanleaks, Thailleaks, Enviroleaks, Unileaks and Openleaks. And now even the Wall Street Journal is copying the way WikiLeaks uses technology to protect sources, and maybe not successfully.

And Al Jazeera has done the same, leading them to acquire the Palestinian Papers – a leak they actually shared with *The Guardian*. After practising journalism for 20 years, I was getting less and less impressed with my profession, I have to admit. The idea WikiLeaks represents has made me believe that journalism can again become an element that makes our world a better one. I believe it was Victor Hugo who said that nothing was as powerful as an idea whose time had come and it should make us feel good to know that there are still ideas to be found that can have a greater impact for good, a greater impact than any military misadventures.

Let me finally quote an Australian editor, who in the mid-fifties was defending his paper's right to publish secret documents. He wrote in a race between truth and secrecy, truth will always win... and this was your very own Rupert Murdoch.

Thank you very much.

Peter Fray: I think what WikiLeaks does is challenge journalism and the way we think about secrets and the way, as we've discussed tonight, the relationship between governments and the media is conducted and I agree with a lot of what Kristinn has said. I believe that it has perhaps taken journalism across the planet, away from its perhaps cosy – as we've discussed – relationship with government. I think that relationship – as I tried to explain in my introduction – is understandable. I do wonder around the question of the information that WikiLeaks provides us and I'd like to hear some questions on this subject.

Can you have too much information? Question one.

Does that information simply just need to be put out there in the public space and let people make up their own minds about it, do you need journalists in that respect?

I think WikiLeaks has stayed a very interesting middle ground around that and I have every appreciation for Kristinn's description of it as "herding cats".

I think there's an interesting question around the impact of the information and the way the information is treated.

A lot of the information we've published has been seen as, you know, secret exclusive cables. Journalists love a leak so we love putting a big exclusive tag on it. I think the challenge to journalists is to mediate that information closely.

Just simply because it's a leak, the inside of a diplomatic conversation that may or may not have gone any further than that conversation, or a cable from say the US Embassy in Canberra to Washington: What is the status of that?

And I do think that just because it's a leak it doesn't mean it's a great killing secret.

I hope we can have discussion around that.

Audience question: My question is on the very last point that you raised – truth. Some people would argue that truth is pure and universal, other people would say that it's subjective, that it has shades of grey. So apart from trying to expose corruption and abuses of power, to what extent does WikiLeaks present the truth, or can it present the truth or truths?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well that's an interesting approach but I think when we look at it, you cannot find the truth without the facts. So it's a philosophical question whether you know truth are facts or facts are truth. But at least I think you need to have the facts out to be able to figure out the truth.

Peter Fray: I believe we have a second question.

Audience question: It seems that journalists are facing a dilemma nowadays that on the one hand we try to turn to the government for more convincing sources but on the other hand I think government tend to fail the expectations from the public on the credibility thing due to the news management and even propaganda.

What can WikiLeaks do for a solution and - as an investigative journalist – how do you think WikiLeaks be used to solved this problem?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: You mean we need to increase government accountability?

Audience question: Yes.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, by exposing the secrets of governments – I think that is essential. I think we have basically failed in the journalistic section and our part of the community. We have too many examples where you look back on where we were lied to. I mean we were tricked into supporting an invasion in Iraq – that was on the basis of lies and deception.

And when that was uncovered, there were no weapons of mass destruction. And there was no Al Qaeda link – the only argument that was left: well we had to get rid of Saddam Hussein because he was torturing his own people.

What we find out afterwards: that we replaced Saddam Hussein with another guy who has continued to torture his own people. I mean, we failed in the running up to the Iraq invasion. We should have been able to call the bluff - to point out the obvious lies that were being presented. That's a blow to journalism, I believe.

Peter Fray: That's an interesting point. I happened to be the London correspondent for *The Herald* and *The Age* when the report came out about the alleged weapons of mass destruction. I would say 95 per cent of the journalists at the time rushed off to print, you know, that there were bombs going to hit Britain in four minutes or whatever the time frame was. At that point in time, you had to trust the government.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: But why did we have to trust the government?

Peter Fray: Well, maybe we don't.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: We should always question the government.

Peter Fray: That's an interesting question.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Because governments lie to us you know, all the time. We can't trust these guys.

Peter Fray: No fair enough, but what would be the alternative then? A government report came out but we don't believe in it?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well I'm not an expert on weapons of mass destruction and I'm not an expert on Iraq but I'm sure we could have found an expert who could have questioned these allegations at the time.

Peter Fray: Well I think there were efforts to do [it]

Kristinn Hrafnsson: We were too eager to take at face value the sensational story. There have been so many stories of that nature, you know, the throwing babies out of the incubator in 1991 in the Gulf War, a fabricated hoax to garner support.

Peter Fray: Do you believe that's because we in the media desperately want to simplify things such that it's always about good versus evil? It makes it easy for us.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: It might be one of the reasons that we are always so, too eager to have, for example, jumped on a scoop if it's handed to us.

Audience question: It's great to see someone other than Julian [Assange] fronting WikiLeaks I must say and I really enjoyed your unpacking of the editorial move from passive recipients of whistleblower information through to reverse redaction, where you're actually having to sit back and work out what you can release without harming people. That seems to be quite a jump in editorial thinking.

I'm wondering if you could tell us how WikiLeaks' editorial values are fundamentally different from the media organisations that you've been working with. You indicated that you weren't very happy with the way that journalists were handling sources, for example. So how is WikiLeaks fundamentally editorially different?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, I was pointing out this incident to point out that, at that time, I had really the hard task of trying to convince *The Guardian* not to reach an agreement.

And if this is heavily edited, you know, I don't know what heavily edited is. There is almost a 12 minute sequence without any editing, with a few comments at the beginning. But we also produced and put online the entire 45 minute sequence in the video. That's one difference.

Audience question: I was just hoping that you could shed some light on the way that you decide which leaks to publish, because I'd imagine and Daniel [Daniel Domscheit-Berg, author of *Inside WikiLeaks: My Time with Julian Assange at the World's Most Dangerous Website*] indicated in *Inside WikiLeaks* that you do get a lot of leaks. What's the process that you go through?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: You shouldn't read Daniel's book. It's ridiculous. It's mostly been ridiculed but I haven't even read it but all the reviews mention that two highlights of the book are that Julian stole his chocolate powder mix to make drinks and that he played too harshly with his cats so suffers from psychosis as a result of this. I've never seen Julian harm an animal, even though he lives in Norfolk, there are a lot of animals there.

How to decide what is published and what is not?

It is pretty much a journalistic call. It is decided on every editorial every day when you get material in. I mean it has to be something that has been suppressed. It has to be in the public interest to be outed. So in my mind it is a rather obvious task of evaluation of whether it should be exposed to the public on Internet.

Peter Fray: Thank you, next question.

Audience question: My question is to the idea of what information to release and what not to release, and obviously it's a very big question so I'm just going to pick out two of the case studies that you looked at, which is the International Monetary Fund hack and the diplomatic communication stuff that was released.

If we entertain the idea that governments sort of work like private enterprise, and then we draw the similarity of this operation with private enterprise and them having secrets – and we know that secrets are important in companies. Some people might have information and then act on it and, you know, derive some sort of benefit from it. And this action is actually made illegal by the crime of insider trading, so obviously secrets in private companies are important for tactical interests in economic transactions. So, governments would obviously need the sort of tactics of benefit when they are negotiating with private enterprise to get a service or with other government bodies.

How can you sort of mitigate the risk that something you're releasing is actually going to be stopping the government from doing something that's in the benefit of the public interest and in doing so unwittingly sabotage what they're trying to do?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: It's a very good question but it's hard to answer it without relying on some examples. But I disagree with linking our governments in fundamentally the same way as private enterprises. I mean there are other concerns when it comes to governments.

I think it's something that has to be balanced. The benefits of keeping it secret possibly and getting it out, it's something that has to be evaluated and I think on almost all occasions, the evaluation would be on the side of getting information to the people.

I've been covering the IMF a lot in Iceland. I've been thinking about what on earth could be there and what on earth could be in the negotiations between IMF and Greece, for example, that is sensitive. I mean it is about the selling of resources, the water company -which is a very heated debate about so it might hurt the possibly of getting the highest value for the national power company of Greece when it's sold out and nationalised because the discussion was known. But the people have a right to know this is being planned and being possibly suggested by the IMF. So you understand my meaning, it's something that has to be weighted.

Peter Fray: We'll move on, next question.

Audience question: I'm interested in how WikiLeaks chose its media partners. Obviously, the release of that information to certain outlets advantaged some organisations over others.

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, I can say that after our previous experience, we choose them carefully enough. It is on the merits of the media outlets. It is some of the work that I've been doing is going from country to country trying to find a trustworthy partner and sometimes you cannot find one, sometimes you have to wait. Sometimes you can't just simply find any trustworthy media.

Peter Fray: What you're doing is buying into a brand - *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* – the credibility of the individual brand that goes with it and giving you also a superstructure to enable you to publish. But given that you have now established WikiLeaks as its own brand, do you actually need to partner up at all?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Not necessarily. I think in the ideal world the best, the way to go forward it would be basically just put the material out and everybody would go for it and work on it.

Peter Fray: Next question.

Audience question: When I visited the WikiLeaks website several years ago, it seemed as if WikiLeaks would simply make leaked information available to the public and let them do whatever they want with it. Whereas it seems that nowadays, they actually actively seek publicity for this information and have an opinion on it and a particular stance. Do you agree that such a change has happened and if so, why was that change made?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, I tried to test that issue in my talk. Yes, I mean there has been a change with actively working with media and promoting the material to try to maximise the impact. I mean get it to as many as possible. Some of the stuff that was published earlier, prior to my days – I have only been with the organisation for a year and worked with Julian since February last year. WikiLeaks has evolved but in line with trying to get maximum impact with the information.

Peter Fray: I wanted to jump in with a quick question here. I actually enjoyed your comment about *The New York Times* running a very critical commentary piece or profile piece about Julian. I can understand why they did that. I'm not necessarily endorsing it but I can understand fully why they did it. They were worried as you say that they might feel like *The New York Times* has sold its soul to WikiLeaks. I was interested in what your opinion on what you saw as the emphasis on Julian and Julian Assange's trial and the tribulations of his in Sweden. Is that a positive or a negative do you think in terms of the organisation?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, it's a mixture of both, but we just can't change the reality of the media world. It irritated Julian greatly when there was this sensational emphasis on Julian's story back in May, June, last year. To the point that he denied to give any interviews unless there was a focus on what WikiLeaks was doing and what it was publishing, not on himself. He didn't like that at all.

Peter Fray: Next question.

Audience question: My first question was going to be – are you looking to distribute information without the press? My next question is – have you seen any change in the press since WikiLeaks came to being, and how is your relationship with the press?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well there's certainly been a change in the relations with the press, and I feel that there's more and more acceptance of what we are presenting in the press. There was a lot of scepticism to start with. Journalists and the media saw us as attacking their turf.

There was a reluctance to admit that we were a part of that community, that journalistic community and a new sort of element that was adding into it. This has changed and there is a bigger, more acceptance that this is a new reality. I was asked this morning by a journalist here, "do you think, Kristinn, that you will ever go back to mainstream journalism?" And I said, "you know, I'm doing journalism and you know journalism will come WikiLeaks' way. So, if I'm to stay on the track - it will become mainstream."

Peter Fray: Do you think journalists faced with this sort of flood of amazing information, a lot of it amazing, will have to take more risk? WikiLeaks in a sense raises the stakes and as it, as journalists take more risks, let's say phone tapping as the current issue as journalists – does it then become more at risk of compromising its ethics in the kind of, because you need to get all this information, you know?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: I don't necessarily think that journalists will have to compromise any ethics but be certainly more critical and maybe seek out actively to be more ... call forward information of this nature. It remains to be seen how this will affect actually leaks in the future, whether there's going to be a flow of information. But we can also encourage it by legal means.

I'm impressed by the initiative by media here have come together in the campaigning that they're doing – "the right to know". I think it's a very impressive initiative. Also, protecting whistleblowers. We as journalists should be activist in the field of promoting these kinds of policies and thereby opening up the gateway for more, a flood of information. Let's hope so.

Peter Fray: Next question.

Audience question: I just want to say that us – ordinary people – we actually choose not to be ignorant but it's quite time consuming to do all the research and find out the truth. I

was wondering about what would you recommend that we as ordinary people do to find the truth?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: It's a political question. Iceland went to total economic meltdown in 2008 and despite the fact that a year earlier, we topped the list of Transparency International, which is a total joke. I sent an email to Transparency International, I said how on earth could you measure [transparency].

They never replied. I mean we basically suffered banking fraud on a phenomenal scale. The banks were ten times as big as the country's economy; ten times the turnover than the GDP of the country. So, the entire collapse was great. What people obviously did, they went out on the streets and they demanded total transparency. But we had to learn the hard way. Now there is legislative reforms, the media, and even the constitution is being rewritten because we saw that our democracy was flawed. People went to the streets in Iceland, threw stones at the parliament, threatened to burn it up, it was a real possibility in a country that has no history of political violence, where people rarely, you know, go out to demonstrate.

Audience question: Have you or any member of WikiLeaks ever felt in danger?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Yes, of course. It is quite a serious threat when you have political commentators and politicians urging for the assassination of, you know, your editor, when it comes to Julian. And people of the organisation being hunted down like terrorists.

You know, you feel a sense of threat but it shouldn't intimidate you. I think if you ask me personally, I have not seriously felt that I was in danger because of working with WikiLeaks but I will not fly through, you know, Kennedy airport in the time being. So, I'll have to take my children to Disney World in Paris instead of Florida if they can twist my arm to take them to Disney World at all.

Audience question: I wanted to ask you a question and I hope you don't find this offensive, but Julian is often referred to in the media as a journalist and I know that you are a journalist yourself by background, but I do question where you draw that line between source mediator and journalist?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, I basically draw the line of what people are doing, if they are abiding by journalistic rules and practising journalism. A lot of my colleagues and the past journalists that I know have no journalistic training and didn't go to uni to get a degree in journalism. But if they abide by the principles of journalism, what I believe are the basic principles, they have a right to call themselves journalists, if they are working in the field.

Audience question: (follow up previous question): But in terms of end product, I mean as a website that mainly produces sources that would be used by third parties to write stories for example. Do you think that we can expand the genre of journalism to include what is effectively making sure that sources are fair, which is what I understand you to do?

Kristinn Hrafnsson: Well, I think prior to the beginning of the big releases, starting last year, I think WikiLeaks was doing more journalism than actually it has been doing since in a sense, because it was not relying on the cooperation with the traditional media I mean there was the element of receiving information that had to be analysed and put into some context and put on the website with a summary, with basically a report written on the material.

But with the massive information that we've been working on for the last fourteen months, we have delegated that somewhat in the cooperation with the traditional media.

Audience member: Okay. Thank you.

End Q & A

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