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Auszug aus:

WikiLeaks & Co - whistleblowing platforms and their impact on the public

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Thema:	School-Scout – up to date WikiLeaks & Co – whistleblowing platforms and their impact on the public
Material-Nr.:	44223
Kurzvorstellung des Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This work sheet informs about Internet platforms like WikiLeaks, which continuously drew the attention to publications of secret US government documents within the last months. • Whistleblowing platforms and their influence are subjects of controversial discussion. This material gives an overview of the information released by WikiLeaks & Co and on different opinions related to whistleblowing.
Übersicht über die Teile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WikiLeaks & Co: terms and definitions • The documents • Influence on the public • WikiLeaks vs. OpenLeaks • Optional tasks and solutions
Information zum Dokument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ca. 6 Seiten, Größe ca. 392 KByte

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M1: WikiLeaks & Co – terms and definitions

DDoS-attacks

DDoS-attacks (DDoS= Distributed Denial of Service) are deliberate blockings of servers through a multitude of online enquiries. Comparable to a blocked telephone line, a website under DDoS-attacks is to such an extent overloaded that it is not able to operate fully.¹

Dead Drop

In general, a dead drop, or dead letter box, is a device used to pass on information from one individual or organisation to another one anonymously and without direct contact. With reference to whistleblowing platforms on the Internet, a dead letter box offers the possibility of keyed data transfers and eliminates any potential of backtracking to the informant's IP address.²

Cablegate

Term used for the publication of US diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks. As a relic of the times of telegraphy, the expression „diplomatic cable“ is still current.

Mirror

A mirror-page is an exact copy of a website, which is accessible by a slightly changed address. Mirrors of whistleblowing platforms are often created in order to protect the contents in case of a prohibition of or an attack on the main page.

OpenLeaks

The whistleblowing platform OpenLeaks, launched in January 2011, was created by former WikiLeaks employees. In contrast to WikiLeaks, OpenLeaks does not release documents – it rather makes them available for interested journalists and works with dead letter boxes in order to guarantee the whistleblower's anonymity.³

Operation Payback

After companies such as Amazon, PayPal, VISA and Master-Card had ended their cooperation with WikiLeaks in Dec. 2010 – either under political pressure or because of ostensible violations of their terms of agreement – hackers bombarded those companies' websites with DDoS-attacks.

Whistleblower

The term „whistleblower“ („to blow a whistle“ = „die Pfeife blasen“ or „Alarm schlagen“) is used for informants who make secret contents, including working conditions in distinctive companies or top-secret government documents, available to the public.⁴

Whistleblower protection in the USA

In the USA, documents of the state are generally accessible to every citizen by law (Freedom of Information Act). There are few exceptions. The openness for control by citizens supports the public interest in such documents. In the USA whistleblowing already has a certain tradition.⁵ There even exist laws like the „Whistleblower Protection Act“ that explicitly support whistleblower's rights.⁶

¹ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distributed_Denial_of_Service 30.9.11

² <http://www.fixmbr.de/toter-briefkasten/> 30.9.11

³ <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/OpenLeaks> 30.9.11

⁴ <http://www.whistleblowerinfo.de/> 30.9.11

⁵ <http://www.whistleblowerinfo.de/> 30.9.11

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistleblower_Protection_Act 27.9.11

Whistleblower protection in Germany

In Germany, there exists a stronger loyalty, or, negatively expressed, bondage to employers. At the same time, the German Constitution delivers more employee protection laws. Since unsatisfied employees can complain about mismanagement with the help of responsible authorities, whistleblowing is not as needed as it is in the US.

Journalists have the right to deny giving away information about whistleblowers, even in court. If an informant is in conflict with his employer, he can be protected indirectly by the Witness Protection Act of the journalists. There does not exist an official law for whistleblower protection, but an informant can relate to article 5 paragraph 1 of the German Constitution.⁷

Whistleblowing platform

Whistleblowing platforms are online portals where problematic conditions (ranging from delicate information on miserable working conditions to secret government documents) can be made public.⁸ The best-known among them is WikiLeaks. The first platform of this kind is „Cryptome“, launched 1996. Nowadays, there are various whistleblowing platforms available on the Internet.

WikiLeaks

WikiLeaks is an Internet platform for the publication and analysis of secret documents, addressable since 2006. Within a year of its launch, the site claimed a database that had grown to more than 1.2 million documents. The design is similar to Wikipedia, since WikiLeaks uses a comparable technology. A so-called Wiki offers the possibility to edit contents for any user. Everyone is welcome to contribute knowledge and information with the goal to form a „collective intelligence“. WikiLeaks focuses on secret government documents such as diplomatic cables, documents about governmental strategies and other Internal information.

M2: The documents

In Juli 2010, WikiLeaks released the Afghan War Diaries, which informed about the precarious conditions in Afghanistan. However, the 4000 secret documents about the war in Iraq, published in October 2010, were even more disturbing; amongst others stating that the war demanded far more civilian casualties (approximately 15,000) than the US Government had declared.⁹ WikiLeaks reveals that the US Government has a formal policy of ignoring such allegations; they record "no investigation is necessary". The logs also illustrate the readiness of US forces to unleash lethal force. WikiLeaks states it is posting online the entire set of 400,000 Iraq field reports – in defiance of protest from the Pentagon.



Another appalling effect on the public was created by the release of a video documenting an American helicopter attack on a group of civilians (including two children) in a Baghdad suburb. Only the children survived by sheer chance, the others were killed.

⁷ <http://dejure.org/gesetze/GG/5.html> 30.9.11

⁸ http://leaknews.de/?page_id=585 27.9.11

⁹ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ver%C3%B6ffentlichungen_von_WikiLeaks 27.9.11

Moreover, civilians who arrived later in order to help the wounded were also killed by the helicopter's aircraft cannons, from a safe distance.¹⁰ Next to the actual crime, another reason for the popular outrage the Baghdad airstrike video evoked was the radio communication between the pilots. The way they talked about the operation revealed that they considered killing as a game and human beings as nothing but moving targets.

Comments of US military officials, which are not consistent with the information provided by the video, deliver additional hints to cover-up the whole business. According to the officials, the helicopter pilots were in combat with armed forces and acted in self-defence, whereas the video shows a few civilians in the middle of a conversation. Since one of them was a journalist of the news agency Reuters, it is very likely that the so-called weapons the pilots claimed to see were actually cameras and objective lenses. WikiLeaks's editor in chief, Julian Assange, accused the US government of having committed systematic war crimes.

The secret US government documents on the Iraq war give proof of torture and abuse in Iraqi prisons, they document the bloody and despaired everyday life of war, illustrate the helplessness of US troops and the increasing chaos. The documents also support the thesis that the US army was aware of the fact that individuals captured by the Iraq Army were tortured, but did not intervene. The human rights organisation amnesty international (ai) requested the US government to investigate on those mistreatments. Washington would have to reveal what the US government knew about torture and abuse in Iraqi prisons, the German ai Secretary-General claimed.¹¹

On Easter Sunday 2011, WikiLeaks made the „Guantanamo-Files“ public, documents which inform about human rights abuses in the detention camp. Torture of prisoners of war with methods such as „waterboarding“ and other inhuman practices – in many cases used in order to gather useful information for secret agencies – came to light. In the beginning of September 2011, the whistleblower platform released the complete and uncensored US diplomatic cables – as a consequence of an internal data leak. The leak had been undeliberately created by David Leigh, a British journalist of „The Guardian“, who published a book about his collaboration with WikiLeaks and mentioned a password within the book. The password permitted access to the unedited diplomatic cables within a censored diplomatic cables data package available on the Internet.¹²

Censored data from the U.S. diplomatic cables had already been published for a few months. They inform about external political relations, internal government affairs, violations of human rights, nuclear weapons and terrorism. Bradley Manning, an US army soldier, passed on an enormous amount of diplomatic cables and secret information about airstrikes in Iraq and Afghanistan to WikiLeaks. He is now arrested under harsh and punitive conditions. It is said that he has to face life imprisonment.¹³



¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ7lDky7YKw> 27.9.11

¹¹ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ver%C3%B6ffentlichungen_von_WikiLeaks 27.9.11

¹² <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/wikileaks308.html> 27.9.11

¹³ <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks> 11.9.11

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