

Wikileaks: now that's what I call an informed society...

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The timing could not have been better. [I am in Dubai to lead a global council discussion on Informed Societies](#) with some top people from journalism, public relations, social media and universities. The Wikileaks revelations of how international diplomacy really works are a live experiment in how to inform the world through networked journalism, the combination of new media technologies and practices with traditional mainstream media and core journalistic principles.



But it also sets the ethical cat amongst the freedom of expression pigeons. Does this kind of publicity make it impossible for diplomats to have the confidentiality that makes negotiations possible?

This is how the [New York Times](#) reported the reaction of the US administration:

“The White House said the release of what it called “stolen cables” to several publications was a “reckless and dangerous action” and warned that some cables, if released in full, could disrupt American operations abroad and put the work and even lives of confidential sources of American diplomats at risk. The statement noted that reports often include “candid and often incomplete information” whose disclosure could “deeply impact not only U.S. foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends around the world.”

On the other hand, veteran British journalist [Simon Jenkins defended the right of the news media](#) to take rile authority:

“The job of the media is not to protect power from embarrassment. If American spies are breaking United Nations rules by seeking the DNA biometrics of the UN director general, he is entitled to hear of it. British voters should know what Afghan leaders thought of British troops. American (and British) taxpayers might question, too, how most of the billions of dollars going in aid to Afghanistan simply exits the country at Kabul airport.”

And how different is Wikileaks anyway? It still needed the old -fashioned newspapers platforms and financing and the support of mainstream newsrooms to present this information in a way that is intelligible and has impact.

It's certainly a great way to start off our debate.

Here is what our Informed Society Council will be looking at:

Access to information

Do existing models for determining what information is made available to the public and private interests meet the needs of society? What do we mean by information? Is it data or debate? Who creates the information and who has control of it?

Technology and digitalisation: How have new technologies and the digitalisation of information changed the way in which information is consumed? What are the economic, political and social drivers for access to the information?

And what needs are there from education and media industries to improve citizen information literacy?

The Role of Society: How are citizens influencing and being influenced by the realm of media and information?
What impacts are there for areas such as science, health and the environment?

The setting of standards: What standards are used to ensure the reliability of information? What formal and informal mechanisms (eg public opinion, reputation, legal systems, government regulation/deregulation etc) are most effective in enforcing these standards? Are there technological as well as legal or political ways of ensuring the transparency, relevance and accuracy of information?

The Hashtag for the event is #WEF and #WEFIS

And my take on Wikileaks? I think that we need to take risks to allow information out. It doesn't matter if its traditional or networked journalism. On this occasion I find a lot of the revelations rather unsurprising. Most of it confirms what any reasonably realistic observer of US/international diplomacy would think.

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