

Extreme whistleblowing

Some of the whistleblowers with the biggest impact include Julian Assange and Edward Snowden.

Julian Assange, the controversial founder of WikiLeaks, made 391 832 documents about the Iraq War available to the media. These documents exposed the unaccountable deaths of thousands of civilians. This case of public reporting underlined the value of transparency in exposing excessive abuse of power.

This case of whistleblowing most probably had the most significant impact in history.

"At 5pm EST Friday 22nd October 2010 WikiLeaks released the largest classified military leak in history. The 391,832 reports ('The Iraq War Logs'), document the war and occupation in Iraq, from 1st January 2004 to 31st December 2009 . . . as told by soldiers in the United States Army . . . They detail events as seen and heard by the US military troops on the ground in Iraq and are the first real glimpse into the secret history of the war that the United States government has been privy to throughout.

"The reports detail 109,032 deaths in Iraq, comprised of 66,081 'civilians'; 23,984 'enemy' (those labelled as insurgents); 15,196 'host nation' (Iraqi government forces) and 3,771 'friendly' (coalition forces). The majority of the deaths (66,000, over 60%) of these are civilian deaths.

"That is 31 civilians dying every day during the six year period. For comparison, the 'Afghan War Diaries', previously released by WikiLeaks, covering the same period, detail the deaths of some 20,000 people. Iraq during the same period, was five times as lethal



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with equivalent population size." (WikiLeaks, 2010).

NEW TECHNOLOGY

This case of public reporting caused huge embarrassment to the United States of America (USA) due to the deaths of so many civilians in a "secret" war that has been manipulated by politicians, military and the media at the cost of the Iraq and Afghan people. The USA is no exception to perceptions that governments cannot be trusted to operate in the best interests of the public.

Fortunately, global trends of transparency, good governance and the enhancement of technology are putting increased pressure on governments to be more open. It is appropriate to conclude with the words of James Madison who said, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary".

• References

WikiLeaks. 2010. Iraq War Logs: Largest Military leak in History. Available at: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/W01010/S00347/iraq-war-logs-largest-military-leak-in-history.htm>, retrieved 31 October 2010.

James Madison. Year unknown. Independent Journal, New York. jcoetzee@nust.na

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