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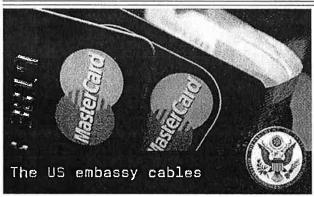
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## WikiLeaks: the day cyber warfare broke out - as it happened

The day after Wikileaks' Julian Assange was refused bail the 'hacktivist' group Operation Payback began to flex their muscles, attacking websites including MasterCard and Visa. Our live blog recorded the day's events as they transpired

Read our latest WikiLeaks US embassy cables live blog



The website of MasterCard is being targeted by WikiLeaks supporters after cutting payments to whistleblowing site. Photograph: Jonathan Bainbridge/Reuters

**7.37am:** It's Libya day on the leaked cable front, plus all the fallout from the refusal of British judge to grant bail to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

The events of yesterday raise a number of interesting questions.

- What next for WikiLeaks? Critics say Assange's imprisonment highlights the overreliance of WikiLeaks on one person, writes Rob Booth. There are plans up to allow Assange to manage the organisation from a prison cell if his incarceration proves prolonged.
- Could Assange face an espionage trial in the US? The Independent thinks so. "Informal discussions have already taken place between US and Swedish officials over the possibility of the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange being delivered into American custody," according to its diplomatic sources. It adds: "The US Justice Department is considering charging Mr Assange with espionage offences over his website's unprecedented release of classified US diplomatic files."
- Are the rape charges against Assange trumped up? To all the conspiracy theorists Esther Addley has a disturbing must-read account of slander and misogny that has greeted Assange's accusers. "Rarely can there have been a rape case where the personal details of the alleged victims have been so eagerly sought out by so many," she writes. She concludes: "The lives of his two accusers ... whether he is guilty or not, are likely to be depressingly predictable."

Meanwhile, the latest cables make more compelling reading and pose yet more some awkward questions for world leaders particularly in Britain, Libya and Saudi Arabia. Here's a round-up:

- · The British government feared Libya would take "harsh and immediate" action against UK interests if the convicted Lockerbie bomber died.
- The cables describe Muammar Gaddafi, as a "mercurial and eccentric" figure who suffers from severe phobias, enjoys flamenco dancing and horse-racing, acts on his whims and irritates friends and enemies alike.
- "Gaddafi relies heavily on his long-time Ukrainian nurse, Galyna Kolotnytska, who has been described as a 'voluptuous blonde'."
- The cables expose a world of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll behind the official pieties of Saudi Arabian royalty.
- · Saudi Arabia proposed creating an Arab force backed by US and Nato air and sea power to intervene in Lebanon two years ago and destroy Iranian-backed Hezbollah.
- The US TV shows Desperate Housewives and Late Show With David Letterman are doing more to persuade Saudi youth to reject violent jihad than hundreds of millions of dollars of US government propaganda, according to US informants.

You can follow all the previous disclosures and reaction on our other live blogs about the cables. And for full coverage go to our <u>US embassy cables page</u> or follow our US embassy cable Twitter feed @GdnCables.

8.26am: Move along now, nothing to see here was former justice secretary Jack Straw's line on the cables about the release of the Lockerbie bomber.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme he trotted out a now familiar line that the cables don't "really add anything to what was already known". He insisted he had "nothing to do with the release" of the Abdelbaset al-Megrahi.



It was a matter of record that Libya wanted al-Megrahi released. It is also a matter of record that I signed up to a prisoner transfer agreement in 2007 in respect of general prisoner transfers, but that the agreement was never the vehicle for al-Megrahi's release. Indeed, he was refused transfer under the PTA.

This was a decision that was made by the Scottish Government and nobody else, they did it on the basis of their law and their practice so far as the release of people with serious medical conditions on compassionate grounds.

8.38am: Scotland's first minister was also asked about the cables on the Today programme. He said:



Frankly I don't believe anybody seriously believes that the Scottish government acted in anything other than the precepts of Scots justice. And incidentally this information - as opposed to what is it suggests perhaps about other people - vindicates and bears out that position.

Last night, Salmond's office issued this statement.

The cables confirm what we always said - that our only interest was taking a justice decision based on Scots law without fear or favour, which was exactly what was done, and that our public position was identical to our private one. They also show that the former UK government were playing false on the issue, with a different public position from their private one - which must be deeply embarrassing for the Labour Party in Scotland - and that the US government was fully aware of the pressure being applied to the UK government.

**8.48am:** Julian Assange is lionised in the Sydney Morning Herald as "the Ned Kelly of the digital age".

Bryce Lowry writes:

Assange is a cyber-bushranger: a renegade taunter of authority and inspiration to many who marvel at his daring to challenge the status quo.

Like the 19th-century outlaw, the 21st-century incarnation has his hideouts, sympathisers and accomplices. In the digital age, though, the weapon is a website; the bullets, information. The problem for today's enforcers is that it is not at all clear if it's actually illegal for Assange to shoot.

Writing in the Independent, Johann Hari, also piles on the praise for Assange:

Every one of us owes a debt to Julian Assange. Thanks to him, we now know that our governments are pursuing policies that place you and your family in considerably greater danger. Wikileaks has informed us they have secretly launched war on yet another Muslim country, sanctioned torture, kidnapped innocent people from the streets of free countries and intimidated the police into hushing it up, and covered up the killing of 15,000 civilians – five times the number killed on 9/11. Each one of these acts has increased the number of jihadis. We can only change these policies if we know about them – and Assange has given us the black-and-white proof.

He's not the Messiah, he's a very naughty boy, according to an editorial in the Times.

Mr Assange would probably not have been remanded in custody if he had shown more respect for the rule of law  $\dots$ 

It may be that he is entirely innocent of the Swedish allegations of rape, molestation and unlawful coercion, involving two women. If that is the case it would make more sense for him to face the charges and be cleared. Sweden is not a banana republic, after all...

He should not be made a martyr over a grubby issue that is wholly separate from freedom of expression.

**9.05am:** Assange spent his first night in Wandsworth prison last night after being remanded until next Tuesday.

I've been told that his lawyer Mark Stephens says the first date he has been offered to visit Assange is next Monday, the day before his next bail hearing.

"That gives me one day to take instructions and prepare his case," Stephens said.

Stephens also said he had asked the Australian High Commissioner to request copies of the Swedish prosecutors' evidence against Assange ahead of his next hearing.

9.14am: There's been some interesting reaction and revelations overnight in Australia.

Kevin Rudd, the former prime minister and now foreign minister, said the leaks are the fault of the Americans, not the Australian Julian Assange.

"Mr Assange is not himself responsible for the unauthorised release of 250,000 documents from the U.S. diplomatic communications network. The Americans are responsible for that," Rudd told Reuters.

The context for this is that <u>leaked cables portray Rudd as a "control freak"</u>, the Sydney Morning Herald reports. Another US cable accused Rudd of <u>"self-serving and inaccurate leaking"</u>.

9.41am: There's been an almighty backlash to a piece in the Huffington Post by the writer Naomi Wolf defending Julian Assange against the rape charges.

In a sarcastic open letter to Interpol, Wolf wrote:

As a feminist, I am also pleased that the alleged victims are using feministinspired rhetoric and law to assuage what appears to be personal injured feelings. That's what our brave suffragette foremothers intended.

The piece provoked hundreds of hostile comments. Amy Siskind, president of the New Agenda, replied with a sarcastic open letter to Wolf.

It was so awesome that your piece made fun of Julian Assange's [alleged] victims. What better way to discourage young women from reporting attempted or successful rapes.

10.04am: Stop writing about Assange, pleads the writer and Observer columnist John Naughton on his blog Memex 1.1.



The obsession with Julian Assange would be comical if it weren't so misleading. One can see why news editors go for it, of course. First of all there's a handsome, enigmatic, brooding, Svengali-like hero/villain allegedly pitting himself against the world's only superpower. Add in allegations of sexual crimes, a handful of celebrity supporters and a Court-side scrum and you've got a tabloid dream story.

Assange is undoubtedly an interesting figure, but to personalise the crisis in these terms is a failure of journalism...

WikiLeaks is bigger than Assange, and it would survive his disappearance, whether by imprisonment or worse - just as Al Qaeda would survive the death of Osama bin Laden

10.12am: "This is the first real battleground between the political establishment and the open web." argues Emily Bell, The Guardian's former director of digital content.

The internet guru Clay Shirky said something similar on Newsnight last night. <u>In an</u> interesting discussion right at the end of the programme, he pointed to the American double standards being exposed by the WikiLeaks crisis.

"If WikiLeaks is attacked outside of due process and just run off the internet because the government has decided we don't like it, that would be a catastrophic loss for free speech," Shirky said.

Shirky's blogpost on the issue, was quoted approvingly the Guardian's unusually long editorial today.

10.33am: WikiLeaks and Assange have "done substantial damage to US interests", US State department spokesman PJ Crowley said last night. You can see those comments on a new Guardian video. It also shows Crowley claiming that the US did not take a position on the arrest of Assange. He said this was a matter between the UK and

Defence secretary Robert Gates showed what the US really thought about the arrest. When asked about it on a trip to Afghanistan yesterday he smirked, and said: "That sounds like good news to me".

10.57am: Operation Payback, a hacking group that claimed credit for taking down the website of a Swiss Bank that cut off funds to Julian Assange, appears to have struck again.

<u>MasterCard's website is currently unavailable after a similar attack</u> in protest at its decision to cut payments to WikiLeaks, according Business Insider.

Mastercard.com is down, and Anon\_operation just tweeted that it's due to a DDOS attack. Of course, Mastercard is one of the payment services that cut off the ability to donate to Wikileaks.

11.10am: The cyberwar over WikiLeaks shows every sign of escalating further. My colleague Josh Halliday has more on the attack on MasterCard:

Josh Halliday. Photograph: Sarah Lee for the Guardian Mastercard, the multinational payments network which yesterday throttled money transfers to WikiLeaks, was this morning brought offline following an attack by internet avengers, Anonymous.

The website of Mastercard would not load just before 10am on Wednesday; an error page cited a "DNS fail". (Here's some technical background)

Anonymous, the group of "hacktivists" vaguely linked to the influential internet messageboard 4Chan, has been targeting companies that have severed ties with Assange or WikiLeaks with so-called "distributed denial of service attacks" (DDoS). Such attacks are illegal and have become something of a subplot in WikiLeaks ongoing release of US embassy cables.

11.19am: Legal help is on its way for Julian Assange, according to a tweet from Sky's Tim Marshall.



WIkileaks: Confirmed - <u>Geoffrey Robertson - specialist in extradition is coming bk from Oz to represent Assange.</u>

11.30am:It's always amusing when Alastair Campbell accuses other people of spinning. Here he is trying some reverse spin on WikiLeaks and its supporters.



I know Mark Stephens, and like him. But he too, like many lawyers adept in the modern media age, is not averse to playing the spin game rather well. So it is hardly surprising that he claims the case is political.

His main line of defence seems to be that the allegations are all part of some conspiracy to get his client behind bars and WikiLeaks out of circulation, and that Sweden will be but a stepping stone to the US where some of the barmier elements have been making ludicrous calls for Mr Assange's execution...

Nowhere yesterday, nor in today's papers, could I see anything that could be claimed as evidence either that the US are orchestrating this, or that the Swedes are doing anything other than trying to investigate serious allegations of sexual misconduct which they would be investigating whether they concerned a Stockholm cabbie or a WikiLeaks founder who has made himself a centre of global attention.

11.44am: One of the lawyers representing Assange's accusers in Sweden today denied that Sweden is being influenced by the US in pressing the rape charges, writes Amelia Gentleman in Stockholm. The lawyer's website also appears to have been hacked, he revealed.

You can read Amelia's article in full later today. For now here's a preview:



Claes Borgström, the lawyer who is representing the two women, said this morning that his clients were "relieved" to hear that Julian Assange had been arrested. He said that the women were "credible witnesses" whose reputation was being exposed to uncomfortable global scrutiny.

In an interview at his Stockholm office Borgström said that it was "unfortunate" for the women that they had been assaulted by Assange, because his prominent position and widespread popularity meant that they were now being treated as the "perpetrators off a crime, rather than the victims".

He rejected the suggestion that the rape allegations were part of a conspiracy to attack Mr Assange, stating that in his opinion there was "zero truth" in that theory. He said Sweden had not come under any pressure from the US to request Assange's extradition, and said this would have happened as a matter of course, regardless of the identity of the defendant. He expected Assange to get a fair trial in Sweden, he said.

Borgström said his company's website had been hacked into and shut down overnight, as had the website of the lawyer defending Assange. This had never happened to his company before, he said.

12.02pm: The writer Naomi Klein wades into the debate with this:

12.15pm: Here's another contribution from Naomi Klein:

"Rape is being used in the #Assange prosecution in the same way that women's freedom was used to invade Afghanistan. Wake up!"

This seems like a good moment to bring in Steve Bell's cartoon today.



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12.37pm: More on the MasterCard hack, from Esther Addely.

It is the "latest salvo in the increasingly febrile technological war over WikiLeaks," she writes.

There's an <u>an interview at the end of this piece with Christopher Poole</u>, who set up 4Chan, where Anonymous came together, who are now operating as Operation Payback

As my colleague Simon Jeffery says, Poole doesn't talk about destributed denial of service attacks but it does get into where Anonymous came from.

12.46pm: Operation Payback has also targeted PayPal, and Twitter may be next after speculation that it is preventing the term #wikileaks showing on its trending topics.

A online poster put out by the campaign says: "Twitter you're next for censoring #Wikileaks discussion. The major shitstorm has begun."

12.59pm: PayPal has suggested that it was leant on by US government to cut off the funds to WikiLeaks.

Tech Crunch reports on comments made PayPal's vice president Osama Bedier at Le Web conference in Paris.

He was asked why PayPal had blocked payments to WikiLeaks:

Bedier's answered: "State Dept told us these were illegal activities. It was straightforward." The answer was met with boos from the mostly European audience.

Bedier basically admitted that PayPal has complied with governmental request, "We first comply with regulations around the world making sure that we protect our brand," he said...

When asked about Mastercard.com going down earlier today and whether or not Paypal had fears of retaliation, "One of the signs that you're a successful payments company is that hackers start to target you, this case isn't anything different."

1.32pm: Here's a Tech Crunch video of <u>PayPal's vice president Osama Bedier talking about suspending the WikiLeaks account "as a result" of a letter from the State Department.</u>

**1.39pm:** Twitter denies that it is censoring the term #wikileaks as a trending topic (thanks to @SirSteven for pointing this out).

Twitter told Mashable:

Twitter is not censoring #wikileaks, #cablegate or other related terms from the Trends list of trending topics.

Our Trends list is designed to help people discover the 'most breaking' breaking news from across the world, in real-time. The list is generated by an algorithm that identifies topics that are being talked about more right now than they were previously.

There's a number of factors that may come into play when seemingly popular terms don't make the Trends list. Sometimes topics that are popular don't break into the Trends list because the current velocity of conversation (volume of Tweets at a given moment) isn't greater than in previous hours and days. Sometimes topics that are genuinely popular simply aren't widespread enough to make the list of top Trends. And, on occasion, topics just aren't as popular as people believe.

**1.50pm:** MasterCard is staying tight-lipped about the campaign to hack its website, according to AP.

MasterCard said it was experiencing "heavy traffic" but did not elaborate.

In the same piece AP rounds-up the other skirmishes in the WikiLeaks cyber battle:

The online vengeance campaign appeared to be taking the form of denial of service attacks in which computers across the Internet are harnessed — sometimes surreptitiously — to jam target sites with mountains of requests for data, knocking them out of commission.

**2.04pm:**An IT firm that helps WikiLeaks collect payments is threatening to sue Visa and MasterCard, writes Josh Halliday.



The international credit card company, Visa, today ordered payments processor DataCell to suspend all of its transactions, just 23 hours after it cut off all donations being made to WikiLeaks.

DataCell, a small Icelandic company which facilitates transfers made by credit cards including Visa and Mastercard, says it will take up "immediate legal actions" to ensure that donations can once again be made to WikiLeaks.

Andreas Fink, the chief executive of DataCell, today warned that the powerful "duopoly" of Visa and Mastercard, which have both suspended payments to WikiLeaks in the past week, could spell "the end of the credit card business worldwide."

"Visa is hurting Wikileaks and DataCell in high figures," Fink said in a statement. "Putting all payments on hold for seven days or more is one thing but rejecting all further attempts to donate is making the donations impossible.

"This does clearly create massive financial losses to Wikileaks which seems to be the only purpose of this suspension. This is not about the brand of Visa, this is about politics and Visa should not be involved in this."

Visa and Mastercard payments started being rejected on DataCell's systems late on Wednesday evening. "We have received a suspension notice stating that Visa Europe has ordered our payment processor to suspend payments and undertake due diligence investigation in order to protect the Visa brand [and] ensure neither the payment processor nor Visa Europe is running legal risks by facilitating payments for the funding of the Wikileaks website," Fink said.

He added: "We can not believe WikiLeaks would even create scratch at the brand name of Visa. The suspension of payments towards WikiLeaks is a violation of the agreements with their customers.

"Visa users have explicitly expressed their will to send their donations to WikiLeaks and Visa is not fulfilling this wish. It will probably hurt their brand much much more to block payments towards WikiLeaks than to have them occur.

"Visa customers are contacting us in masses to confirm that they really donate and they are not happy about Visa rejecting them. <u>It is obvious that Visa is under political pressure to close us down.</u>

"They have no problem transferring money for other businesses such as gambling sites, pornography services and the like so why a donation to a Website which is holding up for human rights should be morally any worse than that is outside of my understanding."

Speaking to the Fresh Outlook Fink added: "It is simply ridiculous to even think Wikileaks has done anything criminal. If Wikileaks is criminal, then CNN, and BBC, The New York Times, The Guardian, al-Jazeera and many others would have to be considered criminals too as they publish the same informations. Nobody even tries to touch them though. You can still buy a New York times subscription and pay with your credit card I guess."

**2.20pm:** A group of whistleblowers including Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon papers; Katharine Gun, the former GCHQ translator who leaked documents about the Iraq war; and Craig Murray, Britain's former ambassador to Uzebekistan who sacked after revealing torture, have <u>put out a statement in support of WikiLeaks</u>.

Ellsberg is quoted as saying:



Every attack now made on WikiLeaks and Julian Assange was made against me and the release of the Pentagon Papers at the time. The letter begins:

WikiLeaks has teased the genie of transparency out of a very opaque bottle, and powerful forces in America, who thrive on secrecy, are trying desperately to stuff the genie back in.

2.36pm: The latest leaked provides interesting context to MasterCard and Visa touchiness over WikiLeaks.

The US lobbied Russia this year on behalf of Visa and MasterCard in an attempt to ensure the payment companies were not "adversely affected" by new legislation, according to American diplomats in Moscow.

A state department cable released this afternoon by WikiLeaks reveals that US diplomats intervened to try to amend a draft law going through Russia's Duma. Their explicit aim was to ensure the new law did not "disadvantage" the two US firms, the cable states.

The revelation comes a day after Visa — apparently acting under intense pressure from Washington — announced it was suspending all payments to WikiLeaks, the whistle-blowing website. Visa was following MasterCard, PayPal and Amazon, all of which have severed ties with the site and its founder Julian Assange in the last few days.

**2.50pm:** Operation Payback has also targeting the website of the Swedish prosecution authority, Reuters reports.

The authority, whose arrest order led a British court on Tuesday to remand Assange in custody, said it had made a complaint to the police after an "overload attack", Reuters reports.

"Of course, it's easy to think it has a connection with WikiLeaks but we can't confirm that," prosecution authority web editor Fredrik Berg told Reuters Television.

**2.57pm:** PayPal boss Osama Bedier is rowing back on earlier statements about State Department pressure over WikiLeaks.

Tech Crunch has added this to its earlier story:

After talking to Bedier backstage, he clarified that the State Department did not directly talk to PayPal and that the letter in question here was actually sent by the State Department to WikiLeaks.

3.06pm: Who should play Julian Assange in the movie? <u>Take your pick from Politico's five candidates</u>.

3.14pm: MasterCard is playing down Operation Payback's attacks on its site.

It issued this statement (published in a typically thorough post by the New York Times's Robert Mackey):

MasterCard is experiencing heavy traffic on its external corporate website – MasterCard.com. We are working to restore normal speed of service. There is no impact whatsoever on our cardholders ability to use their cards for secure transactions.

**3.23pm:** The Swedish Prosecution Authority's site seems to be working fine, despite coming under attack. (Apologies for posting an incorrect link earlier - no wonder that didn't work).

For Swedish speakers [and Google translation users] this statement says its IT supplier has confirmed a denial of service attack, which has been reported to the police.

**3.24pm:** The Guardian's Josh Halliday reports this comment from a spokesman for Anonymous, the group behind Operation Payback:

"We will say that we are moving away from DDoS and working on methods to support WikiLeaks with methods like mirroring the site and other methods to allow WikiLeaks to keep operating."

**3.35pm:** Josh Halliday has been talking to a spokesman for Anonymous, the group behind Operation Payback. He suggested they could be changing tactics.



Just spoken to a London-based spokesman for Anonymous. He wished to remain, er, anonymous.

"Anonymous is supporting WikiLeaks not because we agree or disagree with the data that is being sent out, but we disagree with any from of censorship on the internet," he said.

"This is why we are acting against these companies as we believe that if we let WikiLeaks fall without a fight then governments will think they can just take down any sites they wish or disagree with."

The 22-year-old spokesman, who wished to be known only as "Coldblood", said he was not at liberty to release any future plans. "Anything goes," he teased.

Look out for our profile of Anonymous shortly.

**4.08pm:** Good morning from Washington DC – where State Department spokesman <u>PJ Crowley has just tweeted</u> that the US government had nothing to do with PayPal's action to block WikiLeaks donations:

The U.S. government did not write to PayPal requesting any action regarding #WikiLeaks. Not true.

**4.21pm:** Has the attempts to take down WikiLeaks actually made it stronger? It seems that way based on <u>this analysis of how WikiLeaks and the internet has responded</u> to the various threats against it.

The article – by James Cowie at Renesys – is on the geeky end of the scale but worth reading for an understanding of the nuts and bolts.

Taking away WikiLeaks' hosting, their DNS service, even their primary domain name, has had the net effect of increasing WikiLeaks' effective use of Internet diversity to stay connected. And it just keeps going. As long as you can still reach any one copy of WikiLeaks, you can read their mirror page, which lists over 1,000 additional volunteer sites (including several dozen on the alternative IPv6 Internet). None of those is going to be as hardened as wikileaks.ch against DNS takedown or local court order — but they don't need to be.

Within a couple days' time, the WikiLeaks web content has been spread across enough independent parts of the Internet's DNS and routing space that they are, for all intents and purposes, now immune to takedown by any single legal authority.

**4.26pm:** The <u>article mentioned below at 4.21pm</u> also mentions this: the domain name wikileaks.com is owned by Wikipedia. That's right: Wikipedia, not WikiLeaks. Keeping it safe?

**Update:** Jay Walsh, head of communications for the <u>Wikimedia Foundation</u>, emails to point out that Wikipedia does not in fact own wikileaks.com:

This is absolutely note the case. Wikipedia is a project of the Wikimedia Foundation. The Wikimedia Foundation has no connection to Wikileaks whatsoever. We posses no domain names relating to Wikileaks.

You may be referring to other recent news reported by the BBC that the domain names are currently owned by Wikia, a completely distinct, for-

profit company. Wikia is not connected to the Wikimedia Foundation. You may wish to reach out to Wikia directly to confirm that information.

## The BBC carries this report on the matter:

However, some names, including wikileaks.net, wikileaks.com and wikileaks.us, are owned by  $\underline{\text{Wikia}}$  - a company founded by Jimmy Wales but separate from Wikipedia.

Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, told BBC News, this was because of a technicality. "When Wikileaks first started they issued a press release describing themselves as 'the Wikipedia of secrets'," he said.

To protect the name, Wikia registered a series of Wikileaks addresses, which were sold to Wikileaks a few years later. However, Wikileaks has never completed the transfer, said Mr Wales.

"We've been bugging them to do it since they hit the news," he said. "We try to tell people we have nothing to do with Wikileaks everyday.

**4.37pm:** Political scientist Henry Farrell has <u>this smart take on the implications for WikiLeaks</u> on the limits and extent of state power, on his Monkey Cage blog:

US political pressure caused Amazon to stop hosting WikiLeaks, EveryDNS to break Wikileaks.org's domain name, eBay/Paypal to stop facilitating financial transactions, Swiss Post to freeze a WikiLeaks bank account (in perhaps the first instance in recorded history of a Swiss bank taking residency requirements seriously), and Mastercard and Visa to cease relations with it. This is unlikely to affect the availability of the information that WikiLeaks has already leaked. But it may plausibly affect the medium and long run viability of WikiLeaks as an organization. This will be a very interesting battle to watch.

So: yes, the horse may be out of the stable this time – but the US wants the door firmly bolted to keep the others locked inside.

**4.46pm:** Regarding <u>Politico's attempts</u> to cast the male lead to play Julian Assange in WikiLeaks: The Movie – the obvious choice is the CPS barrister from Law & Order: UK, <u>Ben Daniels</u>. Plus, he's from Nuneaton.

**4.50pm:** Big news: MasterCard confirms that its SecureCode payments system is in trouble, issuing <u>this statement</u>:

Please be advised that MasterCard SecureCode Support has detected a service disruption to the MasterCard Directory Server. The Directory Server service has been failed over to a secondary site however customers may still be experiencing intermittent connectivity issues. More information on the estimated time of recovery will be shared in due course.

**5pm:** Law professor <u>Jonathan Zittrain</u> – the sharpest thinker on the internet and the law, a founder of the <u>Chilling Effects website</u> – recommends this <u>FAQ on WikiLeaks</u> that tells you everything you wanted to know about WikiLeaks but were afraid to ask.

**5.18pm:** The writer <u>Armanda Marcotte wonders</u> why so many people can't manage to keep two thoughts in their head at the same time when it comes to Julian Assange:

It's possible both that Wikileaks is a necessary curative for government overreach and that its leader is out to serve his own ego needs above all. Anyone who thinks that's impossible needs to think harder about what's going on when politicians get sentimental on the campaign trail.

**5.28pm:** More high-tech details on how Operation Payback is managing to create chaos some of the world's biggest e-commerce websites, thanks to <u>Netcraft anaysis</u>:

Operation Payback is announcing targets via its website, Twitter stream and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels. To muster the necessary volume of traffic to take sites offline, they are inviting people to take part in a 'voluntary' botnet by installing a tool called LOIC (Low Orbit Ion Cannon —

a fictional weapon of mass destruction popularised by computer games such as Command & Conquer).

The LOIC tool connects to an IRC server and joins an invite-only 'hive' channel, where it can be updated with the current attack target. This allows Operation Payback to automatically reconfigure the entire botnet to switch to a different target at any time.

**5.31pm:** <u>Internet security services firm Netcraft</u> – based in Bath – also says Operation Payback is "a force to be reckoned with":

As more companies distance themselves from WikiLeaks, we would not be surprised to see additional attacks taking place over the coming days. Concurrent attacks against the online payment services of MasterCard, Visa and PayPal would have a significant impact on online retailers, particularly in the run up to Christmas.

Although denial of service attacks are illegal in most countries, Operation Payback clearly has a sufficient supply of volunteers who are willing to take an active role in the attacks we have seen so far. They are a force to be reckoned with.

Here's the effect on MasterCard.com in a real time graph.

**5.35pm:** Suspected leaker Private Bradley Manning may be Public Enemy No 1 to many people in the US – but not in Berkeley, California, the epi-centre of American liberalism. The <u>San Francisco Chronicle reports</u>:

The [Berkeley city] council is expected to vote Tuesday on whether to declare its support for Bradley Manning, who's suspected of providing WikiLeaks with classified military documents and a video depicting an Army helicopter attack in Baghdad in which 11 civilians were killed.

Manning, 22, currently in the brig in Quantico, Virginia, faces 52 years in prison if convicted. Manning has not commented on his guilt or innocence.

"If he did what he's accused of doing, he's a patriot and should get a medal," said Bob Meola, the Berkeley peace and justice commissioner who authored the resolution. "I think the war criminals should be the ones prosecuted, not the whistle-blowers.

**5.48pm:** The Guardian has just posted a <u>profile of Anonymous</u>, the group of hackers said to be behind the online assaults on MasterCard and PayPal.

**6.01pm:** How did an online attack against mastercard.com also take down MasterCard's payment system backdoor at securecode.com? Because, points out a reader, MasterCard unwisely has both sites linked on the same network connection. Overload one and you also block the other.

**6.34pm:** If you really want to hear (and see) Glenn Beck's use of what Gawker calls "crude chalk drawings" to explain the charges against Julian Assange, then <u>here it is.</u>

**7pm:** Mastercard is saying that its systems had not been compromised by what it called "a concentrated effort to flood our corporate web site with traffic and slow access."

"We are working to restore normal service levels," the company said in a statement. "It is important to note that our systems have not been compromised and there is no impact on our cardholders' ability to use their cards for secure transactions globally."

We'll have more on this shortly.



**7.16pm:** Twitter's official account <u>tweets</u>, in response to many queries circulating about the site's supposed censorship of WikiLeaks or related terms as trending topics on Twitter:

Twitter is not censoring #wikileaks or related terms from the Trends list of trending topics: <a href="mailto:bzfd.it/truthistrending">bzfd.it/truthistrending</a>

The link is to a <u>Buzzfeed graphic</u> from a couple of days ago — "Is Twitter censoring WikiLeaks?" — which explains that it's all Justin Bieber's fault, because Twitter changed its trends algorithm after Bieber so dominated traffic for so long.

**7.39pm:** Salon <u>interviews the Guardian's legal affairs correspondent Afua Hirsch,</u> about Julian Assange's jail time in HMP Wandsworth:

What's the facility like? For instance, is it high-security? Will he have an Internet connection?

He won't have an Internet connection, but he will be allowed visits and phone calls. As far as I know he's not being kept under particularly high security conditions, just usual prison conditions.

(hat tip to Greg Mitchell, live-blogging over at the Nation.)

**7.56pm:** Charlie Savage of the New York Times looks at the legal tangle facing the US government in trying to figure out <u>what law to charge Assange and Wikileaks</u> with:

A government official familiar with the investigation said that treating WikiLeaks different from newspapers might be facilitated if investigators found any evidence that Mr Assange aided the leaker, who is believed to be a low-level Army intelligence analyst – for example, by directing him to look for certain things and providing technological assistance.

If Mr Assange did collaborate in the original disclosure, then prosecutors could charge him with conspiracy in the underlying leak, skirting the question of whether the subsequent publication of the documents constituted a separate criminal offense. But while investigators have looked for such evidence, there is no public sign suggesting that they have found any.

Meanwhile, according to another government official familiar with the investigation, Justice Department officials have also examined whether Mr Assange and WikiLeaks could be charged with trafficking in stolen government property.

Stolen government property? Not exactly high treason.

**8.15pm:** Is Visa the next target after Mastercard? This <u>tweet</u> purporting to come from the hacktivists at Operation Payback suggests it is:

WE ARE ATTACKING WWW.VISA.COM IN AN HOUR! GET YOUR WEAPONS READY http://bit.ly/e6iR3X AND STAY TUNED. #ddos #wikiealsk #payback

Apply pinch of salt: this is the internet.

8.29pm: A reader emails to say:

I've just watched Hillary Clinton stroll out of the Freedom Forum: First Amendment Center in DC, looking particularly cheerful.

The reason for the cheerfulness may be that <u>according to her schedule</u>, Clinton's visit had nothing to do with the first amendment. She was there to meet CEOs from the Business Roundtable.

**8.56pm:** That was quick: the Personal Democracy Forum is holding a <u>symposium on WikiLeaks and internet freedom</u> in New York City on Saturday, asking questions such as "Is WikiLeaks a terrorist organization, or the beginning of a new kind of transnational investigative journalism?"

The panel includes luminaries such as Esther Dyson, Emily Bell and Arianna Huffington.

9.20pm: Visa.com is now unavailable with Operation Payback coordinating the attack.



**9.53pm:** Hi David Batty here, I'm taking over the liveblog for a while. The big news from tonight's leaked US diplomatic cables is that the oil giant Shell claimed it has inserted its staff into all key ministries of the Nigerian government, giving it access to politicians' every move in the oil-rich Niger Delta.

**9.57pm:** Tonight's leaked cables focus on Africa. Among the reports is a warning by the US ambassador to Kenya that the country could descend into violence worse than the 2008 post-election crisis unless rampant corruption in the ruling elite is tackled.

Meanwhile the ill health of Nigeria's president sparked fears of a military coup and caused screaming matches over who was in charge of the country. Leaked cables reveal there were frantic negotiations in the corridors of power when Umaru Yar'Adua, who was terminally ill, left the country in November 2009 for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia.

10.10pm: Tonights reports include several leaked cables about <u>South Africa</u>, with most attention given to the temperament and reputation of the men who succeeded Nelson Mandela as president.

US diplomats expressed strong reservations to Washington about president Thabo Mbeki, who replaced Mandela as president, describing him as thin-skinned, shrill and defensive. Questioning Mbeki's judgement and temperament, one cable warned he would require "deft handling" and raised concerns about his refusal to accept scientific evidence on HIV/Aids and his failure to criticise human rights abuses in Zimbabwe.

Cables on Mbeki's successor Jacob Zuma reveal US <u>concerns about his controversial</u> <u>reputation</u>, which diplomats noted appalled the middle classes, but recommend that he be given the benefit of the doubt due to his ability to connect with poor people across the racial divide.

10.21pm: The vice president of Bolivia, Alvaro Garcia Linera, has <u>posted</u> all the leaked US diplomatic cables about his country on his official website.

Garcia says he wants Bolivians to know the "barbarities and insults" of what he called Washington's "interventionist infiltration". Bolivia's leftwing leaders expelled the US ambassador in 2008, accusing him of conspiring against the country.

The site includes two quotes, "The truth will set you free," from the New Testament, and from Julian Assange, "Every organisation rests on a mountain of secrets".



And back over to Richard Adams in Washington for the rest of the night's action and

**10.40pm:** Sarah Palin claims her website and credit card details have been attacked by Operation Payback, according to an email she sent to ABC News's Jake Tapper:

The website and personal credit card information of former Gov. Sarah Palin were cyber-attacked today by Wikileaks supporters, the 2008 GOP vice presidential candidate tells ABC News in an email.

Hackers in London apparently affiliated with "Operation Payback" – a group of supporters of Julian Assange and Wikileaks – have tried to shut down SarahPac and have disrupted Sarah and Todd Palin's personal credit card accounts.

"No wonder others are keeping silent about Assange's antics," Palin emailed. "This is what happens when you exercise the First Amendment and speak against his sick, un-American espionage efforts."

**10.49pm:** Visa.com remains inaccessible, while operations at Mastercard.com still appear to be painfully slow in the aftermath of cyber-attacks against its network earlier in the day.

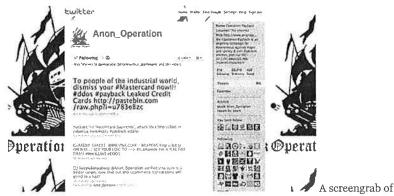
We're still awaiting an official response from Visa. But it may not be so badly off as Mastercard due to its site's architecture: the attacks have been targeted at visa.com and not the company's "Verified by Visa" server, meaning that the attack isn't likely to disrupt Visa's payment processing.

Update: a reader reports that Verified By Visa is also down briefly - so much for that

11pm: Now Visa's payment end Verified By Visa appears to be taken out briefly, making this as serious as the attack on Mastercard.

Internet security consultants Netcraft reports:

Visa.com has been taken down by a distributed denial of service attack carried out by WikiLeaks supporters. Despite having its own website suspended, Operation Payback successfully managed to take down Visa.com by reconfiguring its existing LOIC botnet to attack the new target.



Operation Payback's Twitter account before it was suspended

11.02pm: Twitter appears to have suspended the @anon operation account of Operation Payback ... more to come. The group's Facebook page was suspended earlier in the day.

- 11.15pm: Take any stories about hacked "lists" of credit card numbers with a large pinch of salt: they are almost certainly rubbish based on a quick analysis of the purported numbers circulating.
- 11.22pm: Barrett Lyon blogs on the nuts and bolts behind Operation Payback, which he likens to the movie Fight Club:

[Operation Payback's] botnet is also rather unusual. Unlike botnets in the past (which take advantage of holes in operating systems to install the bot software) this botnet is made up of volunteers. It's opt-in and if you follow their instructions, once it is up and running, you are to, "Sit back and watch the show".

Right now they are a bit disorganized and they don't have much polish to what they are doing. For example, their IRC servers are not tuned for high amounts of users and often crash (which is when Mastercard's web site comes back online). They are also heavily dependent on the domain anonops.net and anonops.info so if those sites go down it will take some work to get reorganized.

Yet, over time, this could really become something resembling Flight Club where the group creates better attack software, better processes, has heightened security, membership vetting, and eventually their own governmental structure.

11.27pm: PayPal have also been taking flak over its decision to stop WikiLeak's payment account - and the company has now issued an "updated statement":

Media reports today regarding a statement made by our vice president of platform, mobile and new ventures, Osama Bedier, at the LeWeb conference in Paris, have created confusion about PayPal's decision to permanently

restrict the account that was raising funds for WikiLeaks. We want to set the record straight.

As a global payment service that moves billions of our customers' funds across borders and across jurisdictions, we are required to comply with laws around the world. Compliance with these laws is something we take very seriously. PayPal's Acceptable Use Policy states that we do not allow any organization to use our service if it encourages, promotes, facilitates or instructs others to engage in illegal activity. This policy is part of an agreement we've made with our account holders and with the companies that allow us to process global payments. It's also an important part of our commitment to protect our customers and to ensure our business can continue operating around the world.

In 2008 and 2009, PayPal reviewed and restricted the account associated with WikiLeaks for reasons unrelated to our Acceptable Use Policy. As soon as proper information was received from the account holder, the restrictions were lifted.

The account was again reviewed last week after the US Department of State publicised a letter to WikiLeaks on November 27, stating that WikiLeaks may be in possession of documents that were provided in violation of US law. PayPal was not contacted by any government organization in the US or abroad. We restricted the account based on our Acceptable Use Policy review. Ultimately, our difficult decision was based on a belief that the WikiLeaks website was encouraging sources to release classified material, which is likely a violation of law by the source.

While the account will remain restricted, PayPal will release all remaining funds in the account to the foundation that was raising funds for WikiLeaks.

We understand that PayPal's decision has become part of a broader story involving political, legal and free speech debates surrounding WikiLeaks' activities. None of these concerns factored into our decision. Our only consideration was whether or not the account associated with WikiLeaks violated our Acceptable Use Policy and regulations required of us as a global payment company. Our actions in this matter are consistent with any account found to be in violation of our policies.

The question remains, for PayPal and the US government: what law exactly has WikiLeaks broken?

11.36pm: An official response from Visa in the US. Spokesman Ted Carr said Visa's processing network – which handles credit card transactions – was working normally.

Meanwhile, both MasterCard and Visa are saying that card holders accounts have not been not at risk and that people can continue using their credit cards.



**11.48pm:** The Nation's <u>doughty live blogger Greg Mitchell</u> alerts us to the latest iteration of Operation Payback's Twitter account, now named <u>@Anon\_Operationn.</u>

This could go on for ever.

**12.03am:** Someone – not me – peeked into the IRC (internet relay chat) going on between the Anonymous/Operation Payback operatives, and it seems there's a hot dispute going on over whether Twitter should be the group's next target, with opinion sharply divided for and against.



France's President

Nicolas Sarkozy kisses freed French-Colombian hostage Ingrid Betancourt on arrival at Villacoublay military airport in Paris. Betancourt and 14 others were rescued on Wednesday Photograph: Philippe Wojazer/REUTERS

12.10am: A cracking story from the US embassy cables courtesy of El Pais: it reports French president Nicolas Sarkozy was willing to "pay any price" to free the hostage Ingrid Betancourt held by Farc. American and Colombian diplomats put Sarkozy's compulsion down to his rivalry with Dominique de Villepin:

Durante un almuerzo con su colega norteamericano en París, hace dos años, el embajador de Bogotá, Fernando Cepeda, atribuyó la obsesión de Sarkozy por Ingrid Betancourt a su enemistad con el ex primer ministro Dominique de Villepin, muy amigo de la secuestrada desde sus tiempos de estudiante en la capital francesa. El objetivo de Sarkozy sería demostrar que él "podría conseguir lo que Villepin (después de tremendos esfuerzos) no pudo", según un cable. La embajada norteamericana coincide con esa apreciación.

12.20am: Ryan Tate at ValleyWag (part of the Gawker blog-pire) sticks the boot into PayPal's weak explanations of why it kicked off WikiLeaks:

So PayPal cut off WikiLeaks' access to its own money due to a State Department lawyer's letter it was not a party to, and due specifically to an accusation of illegality within that letter that wasn't even directed at Wikileaks....

Given the level of integrity and due diligence the financial services industry has shown over the past two years, it's fair to assume all those other Wikileaks accounts have been frozen due to legal and ethical consideration that's about as solid as PayPal's.

12.33am: The Associated Press has a clear explanation of how the cyber-war works:

The hacking group Anonymous, known for previous attacks on the Church of Scientology and Kiss bassist Gene Simmons, is distributing software tools to allow anyone with a computer and an internet connection to join in the attacks as part of "Operation Payback." Such tools are widely available on the internet and can easily launch a large number of attacks on targeted websites, said Dean Turner from the computer security firm Symantec.

12.46am: The Twitter official blog carries this explanation of how subjects become listed as trends on Twitter, in relation to WikiLeaks:

This week, people are wondering about WikiLeaks, with some asking if Twitter has blocked #wikileaks, #cablegate or other related topics from appearing in the list of top Trends.

The answer: Absolutely not. In fact, some of these terms, including #wikileaks and #cablegate, have previously trended either worldwide or in specific locations.

Given the widespread confusion about #wikileaks, we'd like to offer a longer explanation of how we measure Trends on Twitter, and why some popular topics may not make the list.

Its all done by a clever algorithm: "The Trends list captures the hottest emerging topics, not just what's most popular. Put another way, Twitter favors novelty over popularity."

**1.06am:** The New York Times has a good piece up on the difficulties faced by Twitter and Facebook in dealing with WikiLeaks and its supporters on their sites:

The problem came into relief on Wednesday when a group calling itself Operation Payback spent much of the day posting notes on Facebook and Twitter, telling followers which companies to target and documenting hacking successes.

At some point on Wednesday, Facebook banned one of the group's pages, saying that organizing attacks like that violated the social networking site's terms of use. On Twitter, the group cried foul.

Later in the day, a Facebook spokesman issued a statement, saying the company was "sensitive to content that includes pornography, bullying, hate speech, and threats of violence" and would "take action on content that we find or that's reported to us that promotes unlawful activity."

**1.14am:** Vint Cerf, one of the inventors of the internet, <u>spells it out to the Washington</u> <u>Post</u> how WikiLeaks can survive and prosper:

"The Internet is an extremely open system with very low barriers to access and use," said Vint Cerf, Google's vice president and the co-author of the TCP/IP system, the basic language of computer-to-computer communication over the Internet. "The ease of moving digital information around makes it very difficult to suppress, once it is accessible."

**1.32am:** Time to wrap things up now that things seem to have quietened down for the night. Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Thanks for reading.

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