

## **Honesty of WikiLeaks should prevail**

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Telling the truth is an important ethical obligation. When asked, "Do you want to know the truth?" most of us immediately say "yes". We want others to be honest with us, especially if their knowledge affects us personally.

In everyday life most people wish that businesses would represent their products accurately and avoid deception in advertisements. We want politicians to tell us truthfully what they are prepared to do if elected. Caring parents want teachers to tell them honestly how well, or poorly, their children are progressing in school. When doctors have information about our health, we want to know the truth. In short, we want others to be honest with us.

But when called upon to be truthful with others, there are times that telling the truth seems less important than when other people are revealing information to us. When we are invited to a home-cooked meal, we are likely to tell the hostess how much we enjoy the fine food. We may sacrifice some of our desire to be completely honest because we value friendship and hospitality. In this case, the value of telling the truth with precise accuracy may become secondary to maintaining good relationships with our host. In everyday language, we call these responses and similar actions, "little white lies".

There are more serious matters that require thoughtful responses to truth-telling. Recently a web site revealed more truth than many politicians and military leaders wanted the public to know about our lack of progress in Afghanistan. This leak of information, now called "WikiLeaks," has been widely reported during the first week of August, 2010, in major USA and Canadian newspapers, including our London Free Press (Aug.6). Both Canadian and USA citizens have begun to question what nine years of our efforts, our sacrifices of soldiers' lives, and those of Afghanistan citizens, have accomplished in making our world a better place. Present costs to the United States of the war in Afghanistan are one hundred billion dollars annually. A website, WikiLeaks, gained access to seventy thousand pieces of leaked military information regarding the Afghanistan conflict. After sharing their information and conferring with three internationally prestigious newspapers, *New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*, and *The Guardian*, WikiLeaks owner(s) decided to release fifteen thousand pieces of information about the Afghanistan war. The following are a few examples of the fifteen thousand "leaks": (1) military skirmishes lost by the

USA and its allies; (2) increasing strength of the Taliban; (3) torture of prisoners by Afghan authorities; (4). depression, mental illness, and suicides among soldiers; (5) broken homes and broken marriages among returning allied soldiers; (6) corruption among Afghan officials; (7) army equipment lost and unaccounted for; (8) the killing of numerous Afghanistan civilians, often women and children, during USA raids to find and capture or kill individual Taliban leaders.

Political leaders, including President Obama, and military leaders, stated that there was nothing new in these leaked reports. In other words, the leaks seemed to be true, accurate and well known to them. After all, most of the leaked information came from individual soldiers to a U.S. Army intelligence analyst. What the military objected to was sharing these inconvenient truths with the public. The Pentagon has stated that these truths should be immediately retracted and the WikiLeaks web site should “do the right thing” and turn over all remaining information to the Pentagon. The Pentagon added that the web site “may already have blood on their hands” This is an interesting statement in view of actions committed by the military rather than by news media or web sites.

The above statements are “inconvenient truths” which, according to the USA Defense Department should be kept secret from USA. citizens and their Canadian allies. This approach comes very close to being “big white lies” rather than little white lies. I am aware that when we are at war we ought to use caution about the information we share with our enemies, but in a democracy is it really wise to withhold such important information from the voting public who are expected to have input into decisions about long-lasting major military conflicts? In my opinion, honesty, especially with our own people, is the best policy.