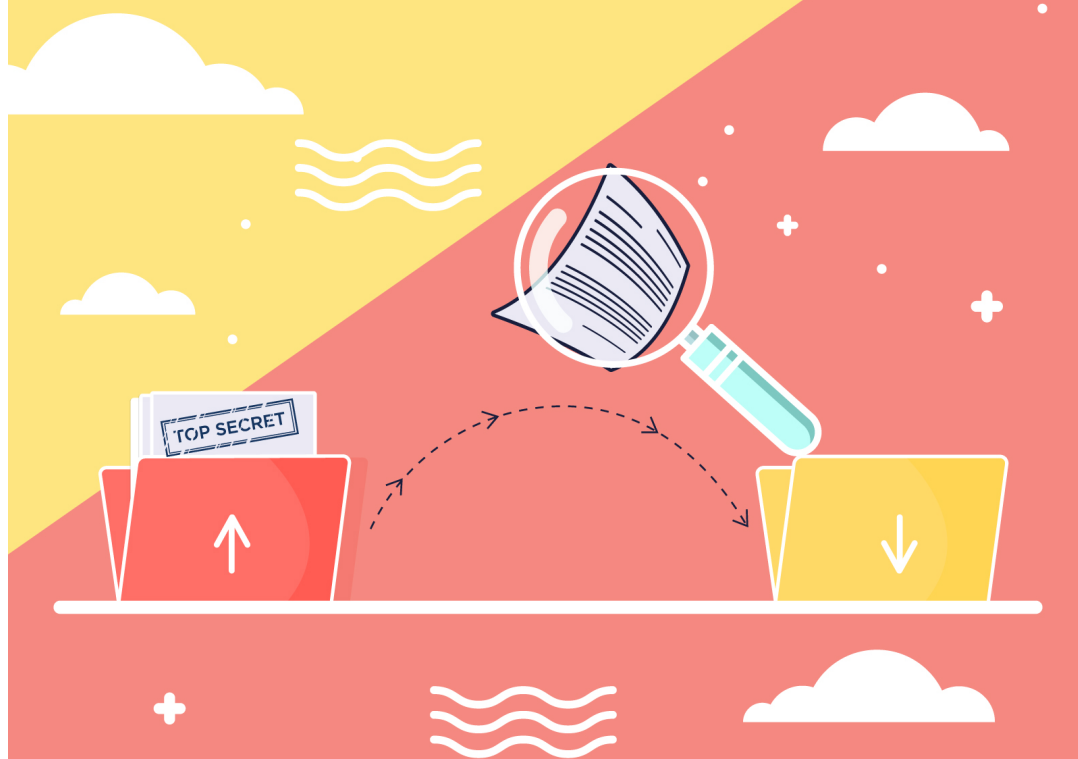


# SUMMARY THE WIKILEAKS FILES

JULIAN ASSANGE



# **Summary of “The WikiLeaks Files” by Julian Assange**

**Written by Alyssa Burnette**

**Learn the secrets behind the WikiLeaks files.**

Introduction

5

What is WikiLeaks?

6

The United States is Not Perfect!

7

The United States' Horrifying Relationship With the Use of Torture

9

Final Summary

11



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# Introduction

What do you think of when you think of Julian Assange? Maybe you've heard that, during his time in Ecuador's London embassy, he held indoor soccer games that wreaked havoc on embassy property. Maybe you heard that he rode a skateboard indoors, careening through the embassy halls. Or perhaps you recall the statements from members of the Ecuadorian embassy, attesting that Assange's asylum was revoked because of "repeated violations to international conventions," along with violations of "daily-life protocols." The latter statement allegedly referred to his negligent personal hygiene practices, with members of embassy staff attesting that "Assange... smeared feces on the walls." Similarly, a friend of Assange's reported that, "Unless the people around him force him into the shower, he might not change his clothes for days." Likewise, another member of staff affirmed that, "Julian ate everything with his hands and he always wiped his fingers on his pants. I have never seen pants as greasy as his in my whole life."

So, when it comes to Julian Assange, we know the good, the bad, and the icky. But why has the story of this rather gross individual captivated the public? What did he really do? And how much of the story can be believed? *The WikiLeaks Files* is Assange's own testament to his findings. And over the course of this summary, we'll explore what WikiLeaks does and why.



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# What is WikiLeaks?

You can think of this chapter as your Sparknotes for WikiLeaks. Or maybe even “WikiLeaks for Dummies.” Whatever you want to call it, this chapter is your guide to the mystery that is WikiLeaks. With so many tragedies occurring all over the world, we are constantly bombarded with urgent, breaking news bulletins and it’s easy for some pieces of information to get lost in the shuffle. So, when it comes to some things-- like WikiLeaks-- you know it exists, you know it’s important, but you can’t quite remember what it is or why you should care. And that’s why we’re going to spend a brief moment recapping what WikiLeaks is.

The simple definition is that you can think of WikiLeaks as being like Wikipedia, but for government secrets. It was founded in 2006 by Australian-born Julian Assange and it functions as an international non-profit organization that publishes classified information provided by anonymous sources. Specifically, WikiLeaks aims to take down big corporations, government institutions, or high-ranking political officials who are caught in unethical acts. By exposing their underhanded dealings and providing the public with information that had previously been withheld from them, Assange believed that he could attack institutionalized corruption. Unsurprisingly, the United States government also got caught up in Assange’s net. And when WikiLeaks released classified information about secret phone-tapping and data collection conducted by the NSA (or United States National Security Agency), it’s equally unsurprising that the US government wanted to shut them down.

But despite facing significant opposition from various presidential administrations, Assange didn’t stop and he fought to keep WikiLeaks from getting shut down. And by 2016, he had published more than 2 billion classified records from the United States government, condemning unethical practices and harmful policies. So, put simply, that’s what WikiLeaks does. And over the course of the next few chapters, we’ll take a closer look at what else WikiLeaks has published and how its revelations have impacted American society.



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# **The United States is Not Perfect!**

This might seem like a no-brainer-- after all, no country is perfect!-- but WikiLeaks uncovered some problematic propaganda designed to deliberately mislead the American people. This was especially apparent when it came to the United States' position in recent wars. Every country wants to think they're the good guys and that they're fighting for what is right; the United States is no different. But no matter how much one might want to think they're on the right side, sometimes that simply isn't the case. And unfortunately, the United States has been on the wrong side of history in a number of major wars. For example, WikiLeaks obtained documents which proved that the United States military slaughtered hundreds of innocent civilians during the course of our war with Iraq.

And to make matters worse, there is no question about the army's culpability in these deaths. The civilians who were killed were not mistaken as threats. They were not killed because they simply couldn't get out of the way of a bomb in time. Their homes were not located in major war zones. Rather, they were rounded up and shot for no apparent reason other than abject cruelty. Readers who might wish to play devil's advocate might pipe up at this point, wondering if perhaps the victims were young men who posed a threat to American soldiers. But the victims were almost exclusively women and children and they were all bound, blindfolded, and led to slaughter, where they were gunned down at point blank range. The victims included a 70-year-old woman and a baby who wasn't even a year old. In these cases, there are no excuses and no opportunity to justify the actions of the United States army. These were war crimes, pure and simple.

The WikiLeaks files prove that the United States army was fully aware of its culpability in these crimes. WikiLeaks has uncovered documents proving that the army ordered soldiers to destroy the evidence of these war crimes and bury any mention of them. And this isn't the first time this has happened. Additional documents prove that the United States army has ordered needless hits and airstrikes in order to kill Iraqi journalists who were reporting on their crimes. They have also cheerfully killed more civilians in the process so that the journalists' deaths did not appear to be targeted hits. Furthermore, WikiLeaks has discovered classified documents confirming the United States' treatment of prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay. Not only are they being tortured, the documents reveal that they have also never been formally charged with a crime.

In light of these documents, we can ascertain a few key things. Firstly, we know that the United States government has committed multiple war crimes and human rights violations. We also know that they have deliberately attempted to cover up their actions

and ensure that the American people never find out about what they've done. So, why has this been allowed to go on for so long? Why have they gotten away with it? Assange posits that this is largely due to the prevalence of an “us against them” mentality perpetuated by the United States government. As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, every country wants to believe that they're the good guys and every citizen wants to be proud of their country. This means that many people are all too willing to lap up the narrative that “America is number one!” and believe that their country always does the right thing. So, when the government deliberately covers up documents that tell the truth and feeds their citizens a steady diet of problematic propaganda, it's pretty easy to get away with war crimes! And that's exactly why we need companies like WikiLeaks. (Even though exposing government secrets doesn't make you very popular!)



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# The United States' Horrifying Relationship With the Use of Torture

Let's imagine for a moment that you're interviewing someone who has the power to do you a lot of harm. Maybe it's not a "you kidnapped my daughter" situation like Liam Neeson is faced with in *Taken*, but more of a matter of national security. Maybe it's someone who poses a significant threat to your country or who has information that you could use to take down an international terrorist organization. How would you get the information out of him? Asking him nicely probably isn't going to cut it, and-- let's be honest-- no one wants to be nice to their enemy. So, what do you do? Maybe you would just beat him up like angry police officers on crime shows who smack their suspects around a little before getting the answers they need. Or maybe you'd really try to scare him to death. But no matter what method you chose, it's probably a pretty safe bet that you wouldn't commit egregious human rights violations.

For example, you probably wouldn't show him a large, wooden box shaped like a coffin and tell him, "From now on, this is going to be your home." You probably wouldn't turn that box upright, force him into it, and tie him up in such a way that he would be forced to stand upright for two weeks in total darkness, unable to move or sleep. You probably wouldn't leave him trapped in that box with no food and no water. You wouldn't leave him there to stand in his own urine and feces for two weeks. You wouldn't toss venomous insects inside the box with him, leaving him helpless to escape their stings. You wouldn't force anyone to endure the terror of being covered in hundreds of tiny bugs, unable to get away. And you probably wouldn't subject him to intense anal rape while he hung from a pole, suspended by his wrists. Indeed, as we come to the end of this list of horrors, it's fairly safe to conclude one thing: the average person would be unlikely to do this to their fellow man even in the context of an interrogation. Why? Because pretty much every human being alive understands that this constitutes torture. But if that makes sense to the average Joe, why is it that the CIA somehow can't understand the definition of torture?

Sadly, as horrifying as it sounds, the atrocities mentioned above aren't just figments of my imagination designed to gross you out. They are a list of very real, and very CIA-approved torture methods that (at least) one real man experienced. We know this because WikiLeaks uncovered highly classified files that detailed every act I just described and confirmed that it was government-sanctioned torture. And thanks to WikiLeaks' efforts at exposing these files, we also have the real, firsthand testimony of the man who experienced this torture. His name was Abu Zubaydah and he was the first person to be tortured under George W Bush's shiny new interrogation program,

developed in partnership with the CIA. The torture started when he was captured and taken prisoner by the United States army in 2002.

Although he was eventually sent to Guantanamo Bay, he was first held in secret overseas prisons known as “black sites.” His first experience in a black site was in Thailand. Before being sent to Guantanamo, he was waterboarded more than 83 times. He has never been formally charged with a crime. Writing about his experience with being waterboarded, Zubaydah attested that the practice was much worse than the CIA has claimed in official documents. So far from being a “humane” practice, Zubaydah wrote that, “They kept pouring water and concentrating on my nose and my mouth until I really felt I was drowning and my chest was just about to explode from the lack of oxygen.”

But the torture didn’t end there. Zubaydah drew graphic and heart-wrenching depictions of his never-ending torment which have now been declassified. One drawing depicts him being shackled in the fetal position and crammed into a box designed to hold a small dog. He was left there, unable to move for hours. It’s also worth noting that this treatment occurred while he was gravely injured with a severe leg wound after being shot in battle. The wound occurred just moments prior to his capture, which meant that he would have needed immediate medical attention. But Zubaydah affirms that although the prison facilities had medical staff on site, his captors deliberately withheld medical treatment from him, delighted in allowing his wound to fester, and intentionally put him in stress positions that would intensify the pain of his wound. For example, he was frequently handcuffed to metal bars high above his head so that he could only stand on the very tips of his toes. This, of course, would have stretched his legs severely and put intense pressure on his injured leg. Zubaydah recalls numerous comments from his guards that confirmed they did this on purpose.

And yet, when confronted with evidence of these atrocities, the CIA replied simply that, “Through observing Zubaydah in captivity, you have noted that he appears to be quite flexible despite his wound.” On another occasion, they also added that, “These [stress] positions are not designed to produce the pain associated with contortions or twisting of the body.” However, the files discovered by WikiLeaks-- and Zubaydah’s testimony-- tell a very different story. And so do the repeated cover-ups orchestrated by the CIA. Although WikiLeaks has found the evidence they attempted to destroy, it does beg the question: if you’ve done nothing wrong, why go to such great lengths to get rid of the evidence? There’s no doubt about it: the United States government has committed egregious violations of human rights. They have openly, willfully tortured prisoners. And they are rarely held accountable for their actions.



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# Final Summary

We all know that our government keeps secrets from its citizens; every government does. When it comes to matters of national security, some things have to be classified, and that's okay. But it's not okay to commit war crimes, violate human rights, torture prisoners, and destroy the evidence. And that's why WikiLeaks fights to bring government secrets to light. Julian Assange is not a perfect-- or perhaps even a likeable-- person but he has built an organization which seeks to hold institutions accountable for unethical acts and abuses of power.



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