

# WikiLeaks backlash all bark, no bite: experts

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Photo shows the logos of credit card giants Mastercard and Visa. Over the past week, the Internet has rung with a call to virtual arms by "Anonymous," a band of computer hackers that has targeted the websites of major finance firms for cutting off WikiLeaks access to funds.

Despite their martial overtones, the attacks on credit card and other websites by supporters of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange are more political protest than real cyber war, experts say.

Over the past week, the Internet has rung with a call to virtual arms by "Anonymous," a band of computer hackers that has targeted websites of Visa, Mastercard, [PayPal](#) and others for cutting off WikiLeaks access to funds.

"The war is on," the group has proclaimed, vowing to attack any entity with an "anti-WikiLeas agenda."

But the campaign has fallen short of a real cyber war, said James Lewis, a specialist in [cybersecurity](#) at the Center for International and Strategic Studies, a Washington think tank.

"I would say that a war involves damage and destruction. This is more like a noisy political demonstration, like a mob surrounding a bank and refusing to let anyone in or out. It's not war," he said.

"For me, this is political theater, kabuki -- entertaining and perhaps influential, but much less than war."

Calling it cyberwar is "a piece of rhetoric," said Allan Friedman, research director at the Brookings Institution's technology innovation center -- especially, he added, since there are no clearly identified camps and "Anonymous" is merely a "very loose online community."

"What people call cyberwar is much more a cybermob," he said.

"The Anonymous have succeed in shaking things up but they have thus far not actually managed to do anything that has any lasting effect."



The website of the whistleblower network Wikileaks. A campaign to attack the financial firms which pulled their services from WikiLeaks has fallen short of a real cyber war, security experts have said.

With their denial of service attacks, which paralyze targeted websites under a deluge of bogus requests to a server, hackers have only hit at companies' windows on the web, which is "a fairly easy thing to do," Friedman said.

"They'll have a first move advantage but I don't think this is sustainable. And all of the websites that have been attacked are now back online," he said.

Similar denial of service attacks originating in Russia, but even more massive in scale, struck Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008, causing temporary disruptions.

"These attacks have a political effect but I don't think they have a lot of effect on people's confidence in using their credit cards," Adam Segal, an expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, said of the most recent attacks.

Visa and Mastercard have continued to conduct transactions, and people have continued making payments with credit cards.

Far more difficult to pull off would be the kind of viral attack that penetrates banking networks and brings down systems for handling financial transactions, these experts say.

"I'm not sure about the capacity of these groups. Probably some of them are quite good, they can probably cause some damage, but it's not clear to me what political purpose it would serve, given the context," Segal said.

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