

'Openness prevails' -- have Obama's promises fallen short?

March 15 2011

WikiLeaks' disclosures highlight longstanding problems of the overclassification of information and failure of transparency laws, says David L Sobel.

When [Barack Obama](#) took office as president in January 2009, he identified transparency as one of the highest priorities on his agenda for change. Writing in the current issue of Index on Censorship, David L Sobel, senior counsel at the Electronic Frontier Foundation in the US, suggests that the president's early promises remain unfulfilled. He argues that, with the US government's failure to deliver on its commitment to [openness](#), leaks are one of the few means of holding government to account.

Sobel's article, The urge to classify, suggests that overclassification of information and the failure of [transparency](#) laws to operate in an effective manner both contribute to an environment in which unauthorised disclosures – like the WikiLeaks revelations – are more likely to occur.

Setting out the findings of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who chaired the Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy in the mid-90s, and more recently the September 11 investigation chaired by Thomas Kean, Sobel notes: "There is no question that the security classification system is (to put it charitably) badly broken and that a vast amount of important, but innocuous, information is improperly withheld." He notes that "overuse of the 'secret' stamp can be counter-

productive and actually weaken the protection of truly confidential information".

Sobel's article appears in The Net Effect – the March issue of Index on Censorship, exploring the impact of digital media on free speech. In other articles, acclaimed commentator Evgeny Morozov considers the political interests at stake in bringing the internet under control, writing: "When some representatives of the US government seek to remake the internet to make it easier to spy on its users, while others complain about similar impulses in China or Iran, this makes the [US government](#) look extremely hypocritical." Index also reports on the ground-breaking events in Egypt: Jillian C York writes about the role of social media in the protests and Salwa Ismail analyses the background to the revolution.

More information: The Net Effect is the latest issue of Index on Censorship, issue 40(1), published today (15th March, 2011) by SAGE.

Provided by SAGE Publications

Citation: 'Openness prevails' -- have Obama's promises fallen short? (2011, March 15) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-03-prevails-obama-fallen-short.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.