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Website for Leaked Data Shines Spotlight on WikiLeaks

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By JEANNE WHALEN

WikiLeaks publishes top-secret documents about government and corporate intrigue.

Then there is John Young, who publishes documents about WikiLeaks.



Deborah Nats Cryptome founder John Young

From his apartment on New York City's Upper West Side, the 70-something architect, computer buff and self-described "cypherpunk" runs a website, http://cryptome.org, that seeks to hold

http://cryptome.org, that seeks to hold accountable the site that boasts of holding others to account.

Mr. Young said his scrutiny is meant not to undermine WikiLeaks, but to harden it for battle. "Doing what they're doing," he said in a telephone interview, "they have to be just as tough as nails. And they can't get tough by having people praise them. They can only get tough by having people attack them."

WikiLeaks has posted hundreds of thousands of classified U.S. military documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the most recent trove released last weekend. Among the posts on Mr. Young's site—which covers a broad range of subjects—are internal WikiLeaks emails showing the group debating strategy for attracting funds and supporters. The

Cryptome posts have provocative labels such as "wikileaks-fear," "wikileaks-snitch" and "WL Hate."

In a July item titled "wikileaks-buck," Cryptome published an anonymous letter from someone claiming to be a WikiLeaks insider, who complained that WikiLeaks provides "absolutely no accounting" of funds it receives and spends. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange disputes that claim, and says all the alleged "insider" posts on Cryptome are fakes.

In an email, Mr. Assange called the "insider" posts on Cryptome "fabricated from top to bottom." He declined to elaborate, or to comment further on Cryptome.

Mr. Young said he receives some documents anonymously, through an encrypted submission system. Asked whether some might be fake, Mr. Young said he was "agnostic on issues of fakeness."



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"There's no way to tell the difference between a real one and a fake in general," Mr. Young said. "So let people decide for themselves."

After WikiLeaks' weekend publication of 400,000 documents about the Iraq war. Cryptome has been busy. In an Oct. 23 item, Mr. Young posted a variety of barbs about WikiLeaks, including an accusation that it holds "dramatic, rigged, press shindigs" to announce its leaks.

Cryptome isn't the only one watching the watchers. A cottage industry based on scrutinizing WikiLeaks has sprung up in recent years. Wikileak.org—singular, no "s"—opines on WikiLeaks' tactics and links to articles about WikiLeaks. Wikileads.net offered "WikiLeaks buzz, news and analysis" before petering out in 2008. Media blog Gawker also posts information about Mr. Assange and company on the site wikileakileaks.org.

Mr. Young founded Cryptome in 1996 as one of the Web's first repositories of leaked documents and top-secret information, publishing documents such as lists of alleged British spies and the alleged site of former Vice President Dick Cheney's famed "undisclosed location" following the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on New York and Washington.

Like WikiLeaks founder Mr. Assange, Mr. Young crusades for full disclosure but is stingy with details about his own life. He grew up in Texas but won't say exactly where, and declines to give his age.



Reuters

Wikileaks, founded by Julian Assange, above, is a focus of Cryptome

Mr. Young said he generates some material for Cryptome by filing Freedom of Information requests about WikiLeaks. On Aug. 9, he posted on the site a letter he said he sent to the Central Intelligence Agency "requesting information or records on Wikileaks.org, Julian Assange and others unknown associated with Wikileaks and its affiliates." The CIA couldn't immediately confirm receipt of the FOIA request.

In the mid-1990s, Mr. Young said, he became acquainted with Mr. Assange through the "cypherpunks" movement, which

united programmers, hackers and others interested in Internet privacy. The movement draws its name from the word "cipher," which means, among other things, a system of writing in secret code.

Mr. Young said in 2006 Mr. Assange asked him to become the public face of WikiLeaks in the U.S., where he was supposed to register the wikileaks.org domain in his name. But a few months later Mr. Young fell out with the group, alleging that its goal of raising \$5 million was excessive and that such sums "could not be needed so soon except for suspect purposes."

Mr. Young sent a heated farewell message to a WikiLeaks Internet mailing list: "Wikileaks is a fraud: F— your cute hustle and disinformation campaign against legitimate dissent. Same old s—, working for the enemy," he wrote. Then he posted the message—and a stream of WikiLeaks insider emails—to Cryptome as a leak.

It was the first of dozens of WikiLeaks items he has posted, their number intensifying in recent months as WikiLeaks has attracted more attention.

Write to Jeanne Whalen at jeanne.whalen@wsj.com

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