

Case Study 4 – Zero Days

PHILL 355E

Max Khamphavong

Nov 16, 2025

## **Introduction**

Out of the other case study movies we had to watch, I must be honest with you and tell you this was the one I found the most interesting. For this paper I will be using the Social Contract Theory to examine and look at the Anonymous Intelligence Source which was portrayed as a female actor representing those who work for the NSA. She explains the creation of Stuxnet and now it was used a cyber weapon for the United States to attack Iran. The problem here is choosing to stay quiet because of secrecy laws or speaking out because she believes that the United States government broke the trust of the citizens and they deserve to know why. I will argue using the social contract theory that her speaking out was the right thing to do.

## **Social Contract Theory**

The Social Contract Theory is based upon the idea that people can form societies by agreeing to certain rules that are based to protect everyone. Thinkers like Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau believed that people need to give up some of their freedoms in exchange for safety and equal treatment. This means the government must act in a responsible way for all the rules to apply. This creates a fair system with a foundation of honesty, equal treatment, and respect for basic rights. When the government does something shady like hides major actions or events then each party has a right to speak up as the social contract is violated. The main idea for this is that the government serves the public, but also not in the shadows that can put others at risk.

## **Applying the Social Contract Theory**

Using the Social Contract Theory the anonymous intelligence person had a strong reason to speak out. The United States government created and used a cyber weapon without any public consent or proper oversight. This type of weapon was something citizens would have never agreed on part of a fair social contract. Our government is supposed to protect and instead they are putting the citizens risk and possible retaliation from other nations. Secrecy will only work if there is respect between the government and the public. For this case the government acted outside the what the public would deem as acceptable. The social contract theory implies that the when the government breaks the agreement than its fair for the individuals to speak up and call upon the issue. Those speaking out helps raise awareness and restores fairness to hold the government accountable.

## **What Anonymous Should Have Done**

According to the Social Contract Theory, the anonymous intelligence source should have spoken out because the government violated the basic expectations of society. By talking about Stuxnet this person was able to bring this attention to the public because they had a right to know about it. Staying silent was allow the government to continually break the rules and possibly put more people in harms way. For a fair society to function there needs to be transparency with the public and those in power. The choice to speak out was the most acceptable and shows that accountability matters more than secrecy. Now to protect this person in the movie they hired a paid female actor, as this could jeopardize the safety for anonymous who works for the NSA. It's important to understand that many of these whistleblowers need to remain anonymous to protect themselves. Remember Edwaard Snowden....? Yeah, he's still in Russia after whistleblowing Project Prism.

## **Conclusion**

The anonymous intelligence source faced in the Zero Days movie faced a difficult choice. She could have chosen to remain silent or speak up to expose information to the public. Following the Social Contract Theory, she made the correct decision to speak up. Even though speaking up may have put her in harms way it was to make sure the public knows so restore the balance. By exposing this brings fairness and accountability. She acted for the benefit of society thus this theory supports her decision.