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**"Obama, Wikileaks and American Power"**

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## Introduction

The publication of over one million confidential US government documents (including up to 250,000 classified US diplomatic cables) by the Wikileaks whistle-blowing media organisation in 2010-11, added to the leaking of several hundred thousand confidential official documents related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2007, and hundreds of files related to inmates at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility on Cuba, in 2010, raises a myriad of issues for students of US politics and foreign policy: not only in relation to the contents of the documents, but also the response of the US administration to the Wikileaks organisation, its leader, Julian Assange, and the alleged source of the leaks, US army private Bradley Manning. There are also wider contextual issues related to increasing government secrecy and opposition to transparency, and the pursuit of whistleblowers who expose malpractice, including use of torture by government personnel. The leaked documents do not represent just the largest leak of official US documents since the Pentagon Papers were exposed by Daniel Ellsberg in 1971 and published in the *New York Times*, they expose US violations of the rule of law, and details of the inmates held at the Guantanamo Bay detention centre. Collectively, and in a broader context, the Wikileaks revelations cast a rare light on contemporary US foreign and national security concerns, attitudes and activities across the globe and comprise a valuable resource for scholars and citizens alike. Where investigative journalism may have fallen short, it may well be that Wikileaks has shed light on American power by supplying detailed, official, and confidential documents on some of the most significant issues of our time, permitting scholars to compare public rhetoric with actual practice. Even more broadly, Wikileaks' autonomy of large corporations and the American and other states constitutes, in the words of Manuel Castells, "a fundamental threat to the ability to silence, on which domination has always been based."

It is surprising then that the Wikileaks 'episode' has been relegated to the political margins as far as US foreign policy is concerned, or perhaps it reflects the rather narrow boundaries of the sub-field. The dominant message from many prominent scholars from

the very beginning was to dismiss the leaked documents as of little significance, even though only a small minority of US embassy cables had by then been released, arguing that they revealed little or nothing not already known or, indeed, unwittingly showed US diplomats in a positive light. The scholarly and mass media agenda having been set, despite US and foreign publics' disquiet, calls for draconian punishment against Julian Assange and Bradley Manning, the issue has been pushed to the margins of public attention even by the media organisations that used, and continue to use, information made available by Wikileaks. In effect, the issue has been seen as an isolated episode rather than having any broader ramifications. Yet, the Obama administration declared the 'leakage' an attack on the entire international community and set about pursuing Assange, Wikileaks, and Manning, employing legal and extra-legal means via state and non-state agencies, and stepped up legal and extra-legal efforts, based on techniques developed in the 'war on terror', to extirpate whistleblowing organisations that dare expose American state secrets.

This chapter suggests that the Wikileaks issue raises broad questions about the character and exercise of American power which should inform any evaluation of the degree to which its values align with behaviour. It also proves revealing in regard to the central claim of candidate Obama in 2008: that his administration would mark a significant shift in policy from the Bush administrations', which the Wikileaks cables reveal to be a hollow claim.

This chapter offers a basic analytical framework to help assess the documents' impacts and significance, considers some evidence from the cables themselves, and evaluates the impact of the cables and the Wikileaks phenomenon for American power and image in the world, particularly its 'soft power'. The chapter begins, however, by examining the underlying *narratives* of US power, the *worldviews* revealed therein in regard to allies and enemies, as well as the treatment of Julian Assange and Bradley Manning.

To large numbers of people not 'in the know', the secret embassy cables and other documents contain 'news': such publics include Americans but also peoples of Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. And they were not so complacent about the messages

revealed by Wikileaks, including the official confirmation, to broad criticism, that the US was engaged in targeted assassinations using unmanned aerial vehicles, i.e, drones. Cables alluded to the hope – a vain one, as it turned out – that the Obama administration would reverse the trend. In fact, Obama has overseen the six-fold expansion of drone attacks and expanded their use to several parts of Africa.

The leaked documents raise the issue of the *ethics* of US diplomacy: there are double-standards revealed in the secret cables or at the very least potential moral ambiguities rather than black and white representations of friends and foes. There are confidences undermined, reputations tarnished, integrities questioned. Cables reveal the extent of US state and corporate cooperation in Nigeria, for example, a state with massive oil and gas reserves and a long history of foreign domination.[1] They also indicate that Nigeria could end up like Pakistan in 25 years – socially and economically polarised, politically unstable, with insurgencies related to political Islam within its borders. The recent payment of a fine by former US vice president Richard Cheney, among other oil company executives, to avoid prosecution for bribery of public officials in return for billion of dollars of oil and gas contracts in Nigeria underlines the point: America's insistence on good governance, eradication of corruption, and political reform as keys to development in Africa is undermined by major oil and other corporations closely tied to America's preferred economic model of development.

The fact that double standards are well known to occur does not depoliticise and close the matter. Such behaviours violate publicly-stated positions of American administrations and undermine their legitimacy, deplete their reservoir of goodwill, the soft power that is supposed to make them so attractive to others that others will seek to be 'more like us' and 'want what we want'.

[1] Cheney case and corruption in Nigeria cables ref needed here. An example of US firms' bribery of foreign businessmen includes Baker Hughes, an oil services firm, in Kazakhstan, in which the embassy played a key role in rescuing the firm's future in the country, see Embassy Cable, "Kazakhstan: Baker Hughes Seeks to Limit Fallout," Astana, 000919; 11 April, 2007. BAE is implicated in bribery allegations in Tanzania, having paid a commission to a businessman of ca $10 million during the sale of a military radar system worth $40m; Embassy Cable, "Big Fish Still Risky Catch in Tanzania," Dar Es Salaam, 001037; 24 July 2007.

## PROBLEMS AND ADVANTAGES OF THE LEAKED DOCUMENTS

The leaked documents provide something approaching a slice of American diplomatic transmissions, discussions, opinions of their contacts with foreign diplomats, governmental and political leaders, military officers, and so on. Despite the quantity, therefore, of documents, there are limits in their use as a source of 'final' conclusions on any specific question. Their representativeness is also questionable – what proportion of total cables sent do these represent? Are they typical or selected for their 'novelty' value? Wikileaks as an organisation filtered the cables before release, and their preferred newspaper outlets further filtered them. Consequently, scholars using Wikileaks documents need to supplement them with other sources – such as biographies, memoirs, interviews – as well as background historical and political context, to make 'sense' of them, to draw any meaningful conclusions that may stand the test of time.

The other point is that the embassy cables, which inform the bulk of this chapter, offer only a single department's 'view of the world' – that of the US Department of State, and not that of the Department of Defense, Commerce, Treasury, etc…. There are few White House documents among them although discussions of Guantanamo may be found in other leaked documents. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence of inter-departmental discussions, positions and conclusions, suggesting that embassy officers were at least attempting to offer a rounded view of US administration viewpoints. From the 'other' side, discussions are reported with a range of foreign contacts from across the political, financial, governmental, and military worlds. Supplemented with Guantanamo files and the war logs, we obtain a broader picture of the mindsets of US administrations in recent times, including Obama's.

The secret embassy cables offer some very interesting material for scholarly analysis. Given due caution, historical contextualisation, and supplementation with other knowledge, the cables offer an opportunity to scholars to emerge from their own silos and see a bigger picture of American global power. Indeed, that was the original post-9-11 rationale for making available to up to 3 million US government personnel the "level 3 secrecy" cables. Government personnel would, it was hoped, be able to make intellectual connections between happenings in one part of the world with those in other parts and,

perhaps, develop analyses that prevented the recurrence of the terrible terrorist violence of 11 September, 2001, which witnessed thousands of deaths in New York City and Washington, DC. The unmonitored and unregulated breadth and unfettered nature and extent of the access, however, paved the way to the documents' leaking.

The purposes of America's power – soft, hard, or smart – according to Joseph Nye, the author of the concepts, and President Barack Obama and the-then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, is to enhance America's global standing, authority and prestige, making it so attractive such that others will 'want what we want', without the need for carrots and sticks. Credible American power enhances the nation's ability to maintain and develop global institutions and rules that make smoother the relatively free flow of goods, people, ideas, and money around the world, strengthening the market system and diminishing 'threats' to those flows and the market system. The purpose of American power is to defend that view and practice of national interests – a world system conducive to American leadership if not total predominance.

Such a global role requires constant attention, the deployment of vast resources of all kinds in relation to other countries, regions and international organisations. It requires the development and orchestration of governmental and private networks, a truly imperial system of relationships designed to promote American influence through trade, aid, investments, public diplomacy, incentives, threats, and the use of lethal military force. In effect, Nye has broken down into its base components the 'alchemics' of a complex compound of powers and capabilities that constitute the, in practice rather messy, idea and attempts at American global hegemony. To maintain hegemony and secure favourable outcomes, however, much depends on actual and perceived American global behaviour, and its 'image', not to mention high levels of legitimacy at home in regard to its global mission. Wikileaks has performed an important service by furnishing official documents related to the ways of American power in the contemporary period.

**A Basic Analytical Framework**

It is useful to develop an analytical framework to assess the impact of leaked US embassy cables, through observable behaviour from the US administration. A four-level framework is proposed ranging from zero impact to highly significant impact:

i. **Zero Impact**: no publicly-observable effects, either in media releases or other public statements;

ii. **Insignificant/Minor Impact**: this may consist of statements to the media indicating administration position, condemnation, denials of the information's novelty or significance, possibly claims that leaked information advantages the administration in some ways;

iii. **Significant Impact**: this would require active management of the problem, which may include condemnation, legal and other action against perpetrators; reform of information security procedures; a media campaign to limit damage; PR offensive against perpetrators;

iv. **Highly Significant Impact**: this may be divided into 4 parts – *Legal*: i.e., major legal changes such as new legislation in the US and legal action by others (UN, other leaders, non-state organisations, individuals) against the US administration; *Opinion*: shifts in opinion abroad; *Diplomatic*: damage to relations with key states and international institutions; *Policy*: shifts in US foreign policy due to information leaks.

## EVIDENCE FROM WIKILEAKS

This section of the chapter examines some of the major findings. Starting with a general overview of the underlying narratives of US power, the discussion moves onto consider evidence of US diplomats' spying on foreign UN officials in New York, in contravention of international law; the half-heartedness of the Obama administration's attempts to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and the continuation of indefinite detention of terror suspects; the protection and privileging by the US of Israel over its Arab allies; embarrassing revelations about Britain's attitude to the US alliance, including its racialised character; information on Sino-US interdependence; possible influence of Wikileaks on the 'Arab spring'; the US' overt and covert campaign against Wikileaks; and the treatment meted out to Bradley Manning.

The cables reveal a mixture of the ordinary and extraordinary nature of America's global interventions: *Everywhere* is an American national interest, in a world that is clearly interconnected and interdependent – Islamic insurgents dealing in drugs in South America are constructed as part of a world-wide insurgency that will take generations to quell not to mention gargantuan resources. Nigeria is the "next" Pakistan while Yemen could become the next Afghanistan – full of insurgents and "ungoverned spaces". There is revealed a global systemic world view that, as Madeleine Albright noted, means America "sees further", takes broader views of 'local' issues. It is the world's 'regional' power, self-evidently indispensable.

Related to this is the composite message or subtext: an *imperial creed* exhibiting an unalloyed belief in the USA as a pragmatic, moderate, rational, reasonable, helpful, progressive, conflict-reducing, peace-seeking, responsible power. There is little room for self-doubt, nuance or ambiguity on this matter. Yet, for all the references to the heavy burden of responsibility, remarkably little reference is made to the fact that countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, among others, despite their implication as funders and sources of terrorism, have been American allies, and recipients of aid, trade, weapons and military training for several decades. Clearly, 'responsibility' has many meanings.

Given the self-confident character of the American self-image revealed, anyone who disagrees with US ideas or policies gets short shrift: opponents and critics are quite routinely referred to as "anti-American" and undermined as personally or psychologically deficient. Spanish former judge, Baltasar Garzon, for example is portrayed as "controversial", mainly because he investigated US allies like Chile's former General Augusto Pinochet and critiqued inmates' treatment and detention at Guantanamo Bay. Critique or investigation of the 'reasonable', 'responsible' and 'moderate' can mean just one thing: that critics are, by definition, unreasonable, irresponsible, and extreme: anti-American.

Nuance and ambiguity are revealed in US dealings with recognised allies involved in funding and protecting and even organising terrorist organisations that attack American and other allied forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Cables confirm that Pakistan's

Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), which receives large-scale support from the US, backs, trains, protects and organises various terrorist groups and insurgents in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as those that attack Indian Kashmir and the 'mainland'. Pakistan is described as an unstable state, with lawless ungoverned spaces, armed with nuclear weapons in violation of international non-proliferation treaties, receiving billions of dollars in US aid – long before Bush and during the Obama administration. Yet, despite US aid, and the personal popularity of President Obama, "America is viewed with some suspicion by the majority of Pakistan's people and its institutions… We are viewed at best as a fickle friend, and at worst as the reason why Pakistan is attacking its own…" The Pakistani administration is also officially confirmed as supporting US drone attacks in its own territory, with premier Gilani saying that "We'll protest in the National Assembly and then ignore it." Embassy cables also note large-scale extra-judicial killings by security forces in frontier areas during anti-terrorist operations. For fear of undermining military "goodwill", however, cables caution against public criticism.

The issue here is the impacts of such revelations on public opinion in those states. Being undemocratic and, sometimes, feudal polities, there are few legal channels for expressing dissent. In such circumstances, the secret cables, despite confirming what many *experts* already knew, take on an incendiary quality: publics finding out, and confirming with confidential documents, that their governments are completely at odds with public opinion that, for example, sees *Israel and the United States* as the main threats to Middle Eastern peace, *not* Iran. This has the potential to increase donations to and support for terror groups, not to mention fomenting rebellion against pro-US and other regimes, including, as argued below, partly triggering the Arab 'spring' of 2011-12.

*ILLEGAL SPYING ON UN AND OTHER DIPLOMATS AND COUNTRIES*

This is one of the most damaging revelations from the embassy cables: officially-sanctioned international law-breaking by US *diplomats.* Not only illegal, the activity undermines America's self-promotion as champion of the rule of law and brings under suspicion diplomats collecting information normally gathered by intelligence agencies.

While the then secretary of state, Condoleeza Rice, is noted as ordering surveillance on Kofi Annan, the then UN secretary-general, in the run up to the Iraq War of 2003, Hillary Clinton is revealed to order, at the behest of the CIA, US diplomats to collect various kinds of information on UN ambassadors, including personal and private information such as DNA, fingerprints, iris scans, passwords and encryption codes, email addresses, credit card numbers, frequent flyer account information, and so on. In addition, and somewhat more conventionally, diplomats are asked for biographical information on UN diplomats. Current UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon, and his office and secretariat were targeted as were America's allies and rivals on the Security Council. The information collected was to be passed on to the "intelligence community". These actions are in direct violation of international agreements: the 1946 UN convention on privileges and immunities, part of the US-UN Headquarters agreement; and the 1961 Vienna convention on diplomatic relations which protects "official correspondence", passwords, etc… Law professors and public officials in Australia called on their government to publicly complain to the US about this criminal activity, rather than pursuing those who made the illegal activity public.

In a number of cables to US Africa representatives, a request to collect information included markings of weaponry, and military base plans. Diplomats in Cairo, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Amman, Damascus, and Riyadh, were asked to collect information on Palestine Authority and Hamas leaders' travel plans and vehicles, among other things. The cables reveal not just the blurring of the distinction between diplomacy and spying, but also show that the range of personal information being gathered extended well beyond the usual, something that seriously undermines trust and goodwill, key components of 'soft power'. Clinton was forced to apologise for the spying order to her international counterparts and the UN secretary general, although no mention was made of any decision to rescind the order.

***"…in the dark halls…and the detention cells of Guantanamo, we have compromised our most precious values"*** (Presidential candidate Obama, 2008)

One of newly-elected President Obama's first actions was an executive order to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility for "enemy combatants" exempt from the protections

of the US constitution and Geneva conventions: "The detention facilities at Guantánamo for individuals covered by this order shall be closed as soon as practicable, and no later than 1 year from the date of this order," Obama stated on 22 January, 2009. Yet, by 2013, no action to close the facility had been undertaken, and at least 150 detainees remain incarcerated there, mostly without charge. Indeed, in regard to the Bagram Airport, Afghanistan, detention facility's inmates, the Obama administration successfully defeated legal attempts in the US Supreme Court to extend US constitutional protections. The Guantanamo files, published by Wikileaks, confirm not only the unlawful and brutal treatment and torture of prisoners but also how little the Obama administration did to enforce its own executive order. Consequently, as with the spying order to US diplomats, the Obama administration did not break with the policies pursued by its predecessor, President George W. Bush. The figleaf of potential congressional opposition served to rationalize the failure to close Guantanamo but the decision to prevent the extension of constitutional protections to Bagram inmates was taken by the Obama administration alone.

As campaigning blogger Glenn Greenwald notes, one of the most notorious cases of illegal detention without charge and then release after 6 years of captivity is Al Jazeera cameraman, Sami al-Haj:

"this was one of the most discussed cases in the Muslim world – that the U.S. would imprison an Al Jazeera journalist without charges for years – yet … it was almost entirely suppressed in establishment media outlets…even as American journalists obsessed on the imprisonment of American journalists by Iran and North Korea for far shorter periods of time..."

Al-Haj , who consistently claimed that he was interrogated almost exclusively about his work for Al Jazeera, and hardly at all about being an "Al Qaeda courier", is vindicated by the leaked files. His personal file notes that he was illegally detained "to provide information on … the al-Jazeera news network's training programme, telecommunications equipment, and newsgathering operations in Chechnya, Kosovo and Afghanistan, including the network's acquisition of a video of UBL [Osama bin Laden] and a subsequent interview with UBL". Viewed in conjunction with the UN diplomats' illegal spying order, this suggests that under the cover of pursuing Al Qaeda, the US persecuted a law-abiding journalist whose work for a legal media organisation had not

violated any laws. If President George W Bush was a champion of exempting the US from inconvenient international laws, President Obama continued the tradition.

Instead of closing Guantanamo, President Obama in his first term ordered the indefinite detention of most remaining inmates. Yet, as the Guantanamo files show, the sources and collation of information as to the 'dangerous' character of inmates is deeply flawed and should occasion significant public concern. The documents show an intelligence operation dependent on informants, from within and without the prison camp, based largely on rumour and innuendo, including self-ascribed al Qaida insiders, many of whom were subsequently released. In one particular case, of a man held for 9 years, a file revealed what the *New York Times* calls "the haunting conclusion of his 2008 assessment: '*Detainee's identity remains uncertain*'." In 2011, President Obama ordered his indefinite detention.

The failure to close Guantanamo, the Obama White House claims, was congressional pressure about the security threat to the United States. However, a *Washington Post* investigation in 2011 revealed that just one congressman had raised any objections to a programme to release some inmates into his constituency in northern Virginia, that even supportive congressmen were not mobilized, that there was no attempt to use the party whips to "twist arms" as is usually the case when any administration resolves to take firm action. In short, there was little resolve and little coordination of effort from the White House, according to the *Post*. Yet, a report necessitated by his own executive order, indicated to Obama that a mere 20 inmates had evidence against them that was deemed 'court-worthy'.

Finally, a European Court ruled in December 2012 that the abduction, forced disappearance, and torture of Kaled El-Masri, a German national, by Macedonian authorities at the behest of the CIA, was illegal and that the state of Macedonia was responsible. The Court cited Wikileaks cables as one source of evidence in reaching its verdict. This is the first time a state has been tried and found guilty by a court of extraordinary rendition, torture, forced disappearance. Once the CIA realized they had rendered an innocent man, they dumped him in the Albanian countryside. El-Masri managed to get back to Germany and start legal proceedings that the United States

dismissed during the Bush and Obama administrations, backed by the Supreme Court. The European Court found that a "total absence of accountability and remedy in the USA in relation to the CIA's rendition and secret detention programmes operated during the administration of President George W. Bush." The Court stated that "the concept of 'State secrets' has often been invoked to obstruct the search for truth". According to Amnesty International, "Both the administration of President George W. Bush and that of President Barack Obama have argued for judicial dismissal of such lawsuits, while at the same time failing to ensure other routes to accountability and remedy." While the historic ruling indicates many more such cases will come to light in Europe, rumours of a return to the rule of law under an Obama presidency had clearly been exaggerated.

*AMERICA'S ALLIES AND FOES IN EMBASSY CABLES*

Much of the US' official embarrassment with the release of cables relates to damage to allies and rivals. Below is a flavour of the way Britain, Israel and China were portrayed: Britain collaborated with the US over transfer of the Chagos Islands on a racialised basis, exposing one element upon which the 'special relationship' is thought to rest by British officials. Cables related to Israel cover much ground including the conscious aim of maintaining Israel's military edge over powers in the Middle East, including other US allies. The schizophrenic character of Sino-US relations is painted in various cables – a kind of 'competitive cooperation' that could yet spill over into military conflict.

*Special Relationship I: Britain*

Wikileaks cables proved especially embarrassing to the David Cameron administration regarding the unequal relationship between Britain and the United States. During the election campaign of 2010, leaders of what developed into a Coalition government were proclaiming their "independence" of, and criticising New Labour's "slavishness" towards, the US while, privately, Cameron's foreign policy team promised the US a thoroughly "pro-American regime", if elected.

William Hague and Liam Fox, who went on to head the FCO and MoD, respectively reassured the Americans they would be loyal, with Fox promising increasing military "interoperability". Told by an American representative that the US wanted a "pro-

American regime", Hague reassured him of his loyalty by invoking *blood ties*: his *sister* is American. He holidays there. America, he said, is the "'other country to turn to'", the "essential" relationship, for people like him - "Thatcher's children".

Luckily, American officials provided reassurance that Britain was safe and special: it provides "unparalleled" help in achieving American foreign policy objectives. The same official thought it advantageous to "keep HMG off balance about its current standing with us" as it might make London "more willing to respond favourably when pressed for assistance..." Yet, he noted, "The UK's commitment of resources - financial, military, diplomatic - in support of US global priorities remains unparalleled". Britain is willing to fight wars in faraway lands alongside the United States and try to marshal others' support as well. This makes Britain almost indispensable to the US. So, the "essential" nation to Britain appears indispensable to the US too. Together, the Anglo-Americans keep going the global system.

None of this will be especially surprising to anyone remotely familiar with British foreign policy. What is interesting is the thoroughly subservient tone and character brought out by leaked US embassy cables and the complete confidence that the special relationship remains central to the UK.

Other embassy cable revelations concerning Anglo-American relations offer evidence of the enduring alliance between the two countries: evading laws to permit the US to keep cluster bombs on UK territory; protecting US interests in the Iraq inquiry, and trying to block the return of the people of the Chagos Islands to their homeland, several decades after Britain evicted them to make for a US military base in the Indian Ocean.

The racial-colonial attitude at the heart of the relationship - pointed out above - is further underlined in regard to the Chagos Islands: their people are referred to as "Man Fridays" in embassy cables. “Man Friday” was 'discovered' by Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe on 'his' desert island, and civilised by him after a suitable period of tutelage. The Chagos Islands were transferred by Britain to the United States to establish a military base and 2000 islanders evicted to facilitate this, back in the 1960s. To undercut the islanders

decades long campaign to return to their homeland, FCO officials decided to declare the islands a "marine park" or "reserve" which would prevent the islanders return and permit continuation of the US military base. The FCO official stated that "We do not regret the removal of the population," especially as US and UK occupation of the islands is what accounts for their "pristine" condition. There would be no "Man Fridays" on the islands in future either.

*Special Relationship II: Maintaining Israel's "Qualitative Military Edge":*
The US is committed to maintaining Israel's "qualitative military edge" over other US allies in the region. In that regard, in 2008, the US pledged $30 billion aid to Israel from 2008-18 in order to keep it ahead of other powers in the Middle East. Obama has maintained the pledge as part of his National Security Strategy, 2010. In response to Israeli objections to arms sales to Saudi Arabia, and fears that such countries might be future adversaries of the US and Israel, the US representative responded that weapons sold to the Saudis, Egypt, Jordan etc… merely replace those which they have bought from the Americans in the past. They are not new generation, more powerful weapons and weapons' systems, providing qualitatively enhanced military power. Implicit within that US reassurance to Israel is a two-tier alliance policy with Israel in pole position – the really special relationship – leaving a lingering belief that the Saudis et al are far less trustworthy or reliable. This is further underscored by the rationale for supplying them US arms: they are "to convince these regimes that their best interests lie with the moderate camp rather than with Iran…" They could go either way, in short.

Cables confirm that US representatives agree with the Israeli assessment that the Goldstone Report into war crimes committed by both sides during Israel's military campaign in Gaza in December 2008, was biased in remit and result. Israelis were reassured, according to cables, that the US was doing everything in its power to prevent the progress of the Report towards the UN Security Council for action, and a request was made to Israel to supply additional information and investigations that undermined the Report. The aim was for the Obama administration to "help deflect any further damage from the Report…".

*CHINA*: *Global Economic Responsibility*

There are numerous upbeat assessments of China's potential as a major ally in stabilising the global economic system if only she would take greater responsibility and jettison naïve notions about "non interference" in other nations' affairs. One assessment of the next 30 years of US-Chinese relations echoed British concerns about American irresponsibility in adopting 'isolationist' policies during the 1920s. It was predicted in that cable that as China's global interests develop, she will realise that the protection of those interests and the system that promotes them requires active intervention. The burden of global economic responsibility which the more experienced and wiser Americans have learned requires continual attention to systemic institutions and rules.

The cables reveal China's willingness to engage in international financial institutions, suggesting reform of the IMF, and even integration of China's currency, RMB, into the Fund's Special Drawing Rights function. There are US calls, supported by China, for broadening representation on IFIs (international financial institutions) to reflect the new economic balance of forces in the world. Cables also reveal British economic and financial diplomacy to further integrate China in the world system.

Despite warning about "Chinese hubris" brought about by its new-found economic clout, cables make crystal clear the power of the Chinese economy. In one cable, Hillary Clinton refers to the difficulties of "talking tough" to one's "banker". There are few anxieties, however, about China's withdrawal from trade with the US or destabilising the dollar. As Chinese representatives are quoted as saying, China has a "huge stake in how the US manages the dollar", rejects protectionism in principle, and wants to play a more constructive role in the global economy.

If at the systemic and bilateral levels Sino-US relations appear positive, in the main, US embassy cables related to Africa are less optimistic. There appears to be no explicit recognition of a Chinese economic, security or intelligence threat to US interests in Africa, though the need actively to monitor Chinese activities is emphasised. In particular, one cable bemoans China's "authoritarian capitalism" model, noted as "contrarian" and "politically threatening" because the Chinese are willing to do business

with all regimes. China operates a principle of "non interference" in the internal affairs of nations in which it invests. China, it is noted, has neither morals nor altruism, acting purely out of self-interest. This was stated by assistant secretary for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, to a group of representatives of international oil companies in Nigeria.

Kenya was judged to be a major destination of Chinese economic influence in Africa. Its imports and exports with Kenya were more than double America's, and China's role in developing Kenya's roads, railways, ports and oil industry contrast with US efforts to promote political and governance reform. China's sale and installation of telecommunication and computer facilities is noted as are arms and ammunition sales. Even more problematically, Chinese investors are criticised for failing to transfer knowledge and technology to Kenyans, using mainly imported Chinese labour, and being involved in ivory smuggling. Fearing a possible backlash – "blowback" is the term used – cables urge the US not to be too closely associated with China's economic interests in Kenya.

As China engages in more and more peace-keeping operations, and its navy has begun patrolling the Gulf of Aden in search of Somali pirates, questions are asked about the Chinese armed forces: are they are an additional global resource or a new threat?

Overall, the embassy cables reveal a schizophrenic attitude to China under Bush, and which has broadly continued under the leadership of President Obama.

**WIKILEAKS AND THE ARAB SPRING:**

The causes of uprisings, rebellions and revolutions are always difficult to locate and disentangle. But as *New York Times* editor Bill Keller (no friend of Julian Assange or Wikileaks) argues, if Wikileaks did not cause the rebellion in Tunisia in December 2010 that triggered anti-government protests and uprisings across the Middle East, "it certainly fuelled it". The description in US embassy cables of governmental corruption, human rights violations and humiliations, of greed and amassing of great wealth in very poor and unequal societies, across the Middle East, appears to have added fuel to the protests that brought down established regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, and bolstered uprisings

elsewhere, including Bahrain, Libya and Syria. The role of Facebook, Twitter and the internet more generally in making viral the Wikileaks embassy cables, confirming in stark confidential US embassy dispatches for the whole world to see the depth of unprotested corruption, may well have had a significant effect on the uprisings against established regimes. Certainly it is worthwhile to consider some, admittedly, circumstantial evidence.

In Tunisia, the Tunileaks website published nation-specific US embassy cables at the end of November 2010 – several weeks ahead of the uprisings there, initially triggered by the self-immolation of a young market-stall holder, Mohammed Bouazizi, in December 2010. The fact that millions of people had internet access assisted the process of informing the citizenry of the corruption and contempt of their leaders. Tunisia reportedly has the highest proportion of Facebook users in the world.

In Libya, Egypt, and elsewhere, a very similar message struck home: that the effectively unremovable leaders and their cronies were amassing ever greater wealth at the expense of the people and were preparing to hand power to family members upon stepping down from office, as in the case of Eyptian president, Hosni Mubarak. In Yemen, the president joked about and drank whisky with US General David Patraeus, while portraying an image of Islamic abstention, in addition to cables reporting that the drone attacks in Yemen that President Saleh had claimed been carried out by his army had been conducted by American forces.

Across the region, Al Jazeera's role must not be underestimated in spreading the word that the US ambassador to Tunisia had described Tunisia's leaders as a "quasi-mafia" that coveted "cash, services, land, property, or (yes) even your yacht..."

Within the Arab world, a Doha Debate poll in early 2011 found that across 17 Arab countries, 60% believed that the Wikileaks revelations played an important role in the uprisings across the region; the same percentage believed that the cables would change the way in which governments behaved in future, and that the world became a better place because of Wikileaks. This is further ballast for the argument that the role of

Wikileaks in fomenting and fuelling change in the region should not be discounted. It is paradoxical that Hillary Clinton played down the cables' significance in order to diminish the status of Wikileaks. Yet, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter, publicly proclaiming an organisation inconsequential does not preclude very aggressive attempts to destroy it.

## ATTACK ON WIKI LEAKS, ASSANGE AND MANNING

The Obama administration has waged a systematic campaign to destroy the Wikileaks organisation, using legal means, public agencies, as well as private information security and financial corporations. The message is crystal clear: anyone who 'blows the whistle' on government behaviour, without authorisation from the administration, will be located and punished, including prosecution under the Espionage Act (1917). Currently, the Obama administration has invoked the Espionage Act more frequently than any previous administration. Conversely, the Obama administration remains free to leak to the media official, classified information that serves its own interests: the 'kill lists' for action under the drone programme; the US-Israeli cyber attacks on Iran through the Stuxnet computer virus which, had Iran committed on the US would, according to the Obama administration, be construed as an act of war; and leakage of the details of the operation to kill Osama bin Laden in his Pakistan hideout, to further promote the Obama's strongman image ahead of the 2012 elections. That Obama aims to continue to keep whistleblowers under pressure is further signalled by the signing statement accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act (2013) in which the president argued that he would ignore anti-whistleblowing legislation where it conflicted with his authority. He would remain the final arbiter of legitimate whistleblowing, undermining a law his administration signed in November 2012.

In the immediate aftermath of the leaks in late 2010, political pressure was brought to bear on several US organisations, via public calls for denial of services to Wikileaks by private corporations – Amazon, PayPal, Visa, Mastercard, among others – alongside shrill calls from several sources, including Vice President Joe Biden, for the arrest or even assassination of Julian Assange, to stop the operation of Wikileaks as an

organisation. Biden referred to Assange as a “high-tech terrorist”. There are also rumours suggesting cyber warfare by the US authorities against Wikileaks, and counter-warfare by pro-Wikileaks hackers against Amazon, Visa, Bank of America et al.

Wikileaks was denied its Domain Name System service and cloud-storage facilities; its payment systems were disrupted; and had its iPhone app disabled. In effect, a private-public partnership was built that enabled an attack on Wikileaks by private organisations, in the service of the American state, because they believed a State Department letter implying law-breaking on the part of Wikileaks, when, in fact, the leaks were covered under the First amendment. Private firms are not subject to constitutional constraints, unlike government. Amazon removed Wikileaks material from cloud-storage facilities; Paypal stopped processing donations to Wikileaks, as did Visa, Mastercard and the Bank of America. Although the technical attempts to disable Wikileaks failed, the attacks on its business services led to a reduction of over 80% of its revenues. Twitter and Google, on the other hand, did not act to disrupt or disable Wikileaks, indicating fissures in the public-private networks against Wikileaks. Nevertheless, despite knowing that Wikileaks has broken no laws, the relevant corporations above continue to deny services to the organisation.

In addition to the above, private information and intelligence firms, like Stratfor (Wikileaks released 5 million of the firm’s private emails), were more than willing to sell their expertise to aid the US administration and others to suppress leakages and deal with whistelblowers. In one email, Stratfor operatives welcomed the Wikileaks releases of documents and hoped to profit from them: "[Is it] possible for us to get some of that ’leak-focused’ gravy train? This is an obvious fear sale… And we have something to offer… mainly our focus on counter-intelligence and surveillance... Could we develop some ideas and procedures on the idea of ´leak-focused’ network security that focuses on preventing one’s own employees from leaking sensitive information...?” Startfor, and other such firms, work closely with government agencies and indeed are largely staffed by former government intelligence agents.

The attack on Wikileaks is seen by legal scholars, such as Harvard's Yochai Benkler, as extra-judicial war on terror techniques being extended to the civilian domain normally protected by the constitution. New laws to 'protect' intellectual property rights are merging with those designed to combat terrorist organisations and will formalize the public-private networks that worked well, but imperfectly, in the Wikileaks case. "It represents a new threat… to the very foundations of the rule of law in the United States," and a threat to media freedom and transparency, Benkler argues.

The head of Wikileaks, Julian Assange, currently asserting asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, has been labelled a terrorist and is wanted for questioning in Sweden on sexual and rape allegations. It is widely believed that those allegations provide the formal cover to take to Sweden Assange and from there to extradite him to the United States to faces charges under the Espionage Act. There are several issues: first, Assange is not an American citizen; Wikileaks leaked documents from outside the USA; and Assange did not steal the documents; all of which raises the issue of the extra-territorial application of US law. Secondly, there are doubts as to the sincerity of the Swedish authorities particularly because of the apparently incompetent way that the case against him has been pursued. The former district prosecutor for Stockholm, Sven-Erik Alhelm, and now a professor of law at Lund University, in a sworn affidavit noted several unusual aspects of the investigation of Assange: that he has yet to be charged for any offence, that the two women alleging rape and other sexual offences were interviewed by police together rather than separately, that the Swedish prosecutor went 'public' with rape allegations in violation of normal procedure, and that issuing a European Arrest Warrant appeared excessive in the absence of formal charges.

It is important also to remember that Sweden contributes military forces under US-NATO control in Afghanistan; it contributed military assistance during the Libyan intervention; its ministers report regularly on military and intelligence matters to the US embassy; its Afghanistan-based aid agencies supply intelligence to the United States on a regular basis. It collaborated with the United States on extraordinary rendition by the CIA of people who had applied for asylum to Sweden. And Assange's Wikileaks website exposed a whole range of US-Swedish cooperation that did not reflect well on Sweden's

global image as "a good state". A country so close to the United States may be likely to extradite Assange. If that is assumed, then the violations of police and judicial procedures during the early part of the investigation of Assange's alleged sexual assault and rape of two Swedish women - which he denies - acquire an essential political context that appears lacking in most mainstream analyses of the matter.

*Bradley Manning: held in military detention, allegations of cruel and unusual punishment*

Manning is alleged to have passed to Wikileaks hundreds of thousands of confidential US government documents and has been held in military detention since 2010 and faces a life sentence if found guilty. For much of that time, he was kept in solitary confinement and stripped of clothing at night as part of a 'suicide-watch' regime rejected by US army doctors as unnecessary.

According to a petition by his lawyers, and supported by the defense lawyers' website, Manning was required to eat alone using only a spoon; not allowed to speak with other prisoners; slept on a suicide mattress with a coarse "tear-proof security blanket" resulting in rashes and carpet burns; not permitted any personal items nor exercise in his cell. Manning was constantly monitored every five minutes, some lights in his cell were on permanently; the fluorescent light outside his cell was kept on during the night. These conditions were in addition to the maximum custody conditions imposed, which included being placed in a cell directly in front of the guard post so he could be monitored at all hours of the day, having to wake up at 5 am each day, having to stay awake until 10 pm every day and not being permitted to lie down or lean against the cell wall. In January 2013, Manning's possible future sentence was reduced by 112 days in recompense for the "excessively harsh treatment" he received at the Quantico marine base, Virginia, where he has been incarcerated. The United Nations' special rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez, has been denied unfetterd access to Bradley Manning and, indeed, to inmates at Guantanamo, to ascertain firsthand from Manning and others the condition of their detention. Manning has yet to be tried in any court or, therefore, found guilty of any offence. In March 2011, State Department spokesman, PJ Crowley, was forced to resign after he commented that,

"What is being done to Bradley Manning is ridiculous and counterproductive and stupid on the part of the department of defence." Crowley continued that his remarks "were intended to highlight the broader, even strategic impact of discreet actions undertaken by national security agencies…and their impact on our global standing and leadership. The exercise of power in today's challenging times and relentless media environment must be prudent and consistent with our laws and values."

President Obama stated he was reassured by the Pentagon that Manning's confinement was "appropriate" although he had previously made improving America's global standing one of the key aims of his administration. He had also denounced detainees' extreme treatment by the Bush administration but has failed to either prevent its continuation or apologise or compensate innocent victims of torture, rendition or forced disappearance..

**CONCLUSIONS**

The claim that there are no, or very few, negative consequences for the US resulting from the Wikileaks revelations and phenomenon more generally appears complacent if not invalid. There is much even in the brief review above suggesting that there is new previously unknown material now publicly available that has already had negative consequences for America's influence and standing in the world and in relation to specific nations. The argument is made that even material that was known by experts is politically salient due to its publication to a global audience. This is particularly a problem for those who either support American influence or those who are open-minded. It is in those populations that the impact of the secret cables, based on how they are interpreted and presented in their nation's media, is likely to be strongest and most interesting. Peoples already opposed to or sceptical about US power will find plenty of material to confirm their extant suspicions: it is supremely useful to have in one's arsenal facts and opinions from the source itself, offering a kind of unsolicited confession.

The other issue is that the political handling of the Wikileaks affair is an additional factor in itself, adding further to the fall out from the leaked documents. For the manner of its handling also speaks volumes about the character of a polity and society, particularly about how closely its actions conform to its stated values and ideals. In that regard, the United States is especially vulnerable given the values-based public rhetoric of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. For the UN expert on torture to criticise the treatment of Bradley Manning exposes a glaring sense of immunity from international supervision.

And the European Court's historic ruling in December 2013, and its use of some Wikileaks material in reaching its findings, indicates that further exposure of the routine use of torture by the CIA and US-allied nations is likely to continue, and continue demonstrate American officials' impunity from international laws to which the country is signatory.

Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton's, calls for internet freedom in authoritarian states, like China, where Google was destabilised for causing offence to high officials, may now be seen in a harsher light. Media and opinion-management go hand in hand. Agenda-setting and issue-framing are fundamental to effective media management strategies: actions, policies, approaches that powerful states take or propose must be sold to publics in order to be politically-salient. Wikileaks is a major disruption to various such agendas because it represents a loss of control. While minority opinions are considered worthy they tend not to be backed by large resources: the internet age may provide anyone with access a voice but it is likely to be a small voice and get out to relatively few people unless backed up by the kind of resources only major corporations and state agencies possess. Wikileaks has not only gained world-wide attention through its previous publicity campaigns, especially the war logs of 2010, but also by leveraging major respected print and on-line news outlets like the *New York Times, The Guardian, and The Hindu,* among others. Despite Wikileaks censoring certain kinds of information, especially related to individuals who may be at risk if their names were publicised, and allowing the news outlets to show material to US officials before publication, this still represents a significant shift in the balance of power and initiative. A handful of people who run a small organisation based on donations has seized the media and opinion-management initiative. As cables show, both the Bush and Obama administrations pay keen attention to ensuring a favourable media image of the US, and minimising negative images, as one would expect. It is the loss of control that is especially significant.

In light of Obama's promises to restore America's image and moral standing, the Wikileaks release of secret cables, and the draconian handling of the matter, is severely damaging. Further and deeper analysis of the Wikileaks archives is highly recommended.

Further Readings and Websites:

Wikileaks.org – the entire set of documents from private and governmental sources

Cablesearch.org – a slightly more user-friendly document search site

*Foreign Policy* articles collection on the embassy cables;

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/o2/22/cable_news

Glenn Greenwald's blog at Salon.org

Bachrach, J., "WikiHistory: Did the Leaks Inspire the Arab Spring?" *World Affairs Journal* July-August 2011

Benkler, Y., "Wikileaks and the Protect-IP Act: A New Public-Private Threat to the Internet Commons," *Daedalus*, 2011

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