



WikiLeaks Releases U.S. Diplomatic Cables

The Internet-based watchdog site WikiLeaks began releasing more than 250,000 U.S. diplomatic cables in batches beginning November 28, earning the condemnation of the Obama administration and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The documents, which include frank assessments of foreign political officials, have already embarrassed U.S. diplomats to a variety of countries.



As with its previous releases on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, WikiLeaks provided an advance peek at the documents to certain media establishment organs, specifically the [New York Times](#), the London [Guardian](#), [Der Spiegel](#) of Germany, [Le Monde](#) of Paris and [El Pais](#) of Madrid.

The [New York Times](#) [reported](#) that the documents covered much of the Bush administration and the first part of the Obama administration. “Some of the cables,” the [Times](#) [continued](#), “were written as recently as late February, revealing the Obama administration’s exchanges over crises and conflicts.” According to [Der Spiegel](#), “Six percent of the reports, or 16,652 cables, are labeled as ‘secret’ and of those, 4,330 are so explosive that they are labeled ‘NOFORN,’ meaning access should not be made available to non-US nationals.”

The WikiLeaks [revelations](#) included a variety of embarrassing evaluations of foreign countries by U.S. diplomats, such as:

- **Egypt:** [Der Spiegel](#) [reported](#) that “Egyptian President Hosni Mubarek ... claims to have always known that the Iraq war was the ‘biggest mistake ever committed’ and ... advised the Americans to ‘forget about democracy in Iraq.’ Once the US forces depart, Mubarak said, the best way to ensure a peaceful transition is for there to be a military coup.”
- **Russia:** Russia is a “virtual Mafia state,” according to [one diplomatic cable](#).
- **Italy:** Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi is [tied](#) to Russia’s Mafia state by “lavish gifts” from Vladimir Putin, as well as through alleged business ties.
- **Afganistan:** Afghan President Hamid Karzai is [described](#) as being “driven by paranoia.” Vice President Zia Massoud took \$52 million in cash with him in a trip to the United Arab Emirates.
- **Germany:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel was derisively [described](#) by U.S. diplomats as a politician who “avoids risk and is rarely creative.”
- **Saudi Arabia:** King Abdullah [urged](#) the United States to invade Iran to stop its nuclear program.

The WikiLeaks documents also embarrassed U.S. diplomatic efforts directly. U.S. diplomats were [urged](#) to gather intelligence, according to CNN, becoming essentially spies in foreign nations. This revelation



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on November 29, 2010

will hurt U.S. diplomats in the future. In addition, U.S. State Department officials under the Obama administration [bluntly told](#) smaller foreign countries such as Slovenia that the price of meeting with the U.S. President was to accept a Guantanamo prisoner, in furtherance of Obama's campaign promise to close the Guantanamo Bay prison within a year of taking office. Yet more than 170 prisoners remain at Guantanamo, a year after the lapse of his self-imposed deadline.

The White House Press Office quickly [condemned](#) WikiLeaks' latest release:

President Obama supports responsible, accountable, and open government at home and around the world, but this reckless and dangerous action runs counter to that goal. By releasing stolen and classified documents, Wikileaks has put at risk not only the cause of human rights but also the lives and work of these individuals. We condemn in the strongest terms the unauthorized disclosure of classified documents and sensitive national security information.

WikiLeaks spokesman Julian Assange [countered](#) that "WikiLeaks has absolutely no desire to put individual persons at significant risk of harm, nor do we wish to harm the national security of the United States." Assange added in a letter to U.S. Ambassador Louis B. Susman that he had been willing to work with the U.S. State Department to eliminate documents that would have truly endangered lives or peace, but that the State Department had [chosen confrontation instead](#):

Instead of eliminating the risk you allege to lives and military operations you have rejected our offer for constructive dialogue and chosen a confrontational approach. The response provided by the US State Department overnight was no more than a lawyer's press release, which is confirmed by the fact you have released it to the press (a matter about which I make no complaint)... You have chosen to respond in a manner which leads me to conclude that the supposed risks are entirely fanciful and you are instead concerned to suppress evidence of human rights abuse and other criminal behaviour.

The WikiLeaks revelations will definitely embarrass U.S. diplomats, but it remains an open question subject to interpretation as to whether the revelations will do more good than harm. The leaks do reveal much about the diplomatic negotiations and diplomatic goals of the United States, which involves itself in great detail in other nations' internal affairs — precisely what George Washington warned against in his [Farewell Address](#):

Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice? It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

By exposing the State Department's inversion of Washington's sage advice on entangling alliances, WikiLeaks is embarrassing the U.S. government but may also be doing a great service to the American people.

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