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Cables Reveal Propaganda, Disinformation Efforts by US

By John Glaser

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State Department diplomatic cables released this week by WikiLeaks reveal propaganda efforts aimed at countering negative public perceptions about American wars and the torture regime in Guantánamo Bay detention center.

[One cable](#) detailed a trip to the Sudan by US Ambassador to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture Tony Hall aimed at “spotlight[ing] the U.S. Government’s role as a humanitarian leader.”

“Facing off in a world media environment dominated by themes like Iraq and terrorism, USUN-Rome mounted a month-long blitz that promoted a positive American story,” reads the cable. The trip entailed “a coordinated media outreach plan” that “reached targeted audiences in Europe and the Muslim world with the story of U.S. generosity.”

The cable notes that the UN delegation’s officers “worked to ensure that the Ambassador’s party included journalists from The Washington Post, Cox News Service, VOA, The Economist, Sunday Times of London and Knight-Ridder.” And another “press conference organized by the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum produced additional coverage by the Associated Press, Agence France- Presse, Al Ayam, Alwan, Sudan Tribune and Middle East Broadcasting Corp.”

Summarizing the Ambassador's visit to the starving and war-ravaged Sudan, the cable notes approvingly that the positive media attention achieved the mission's goal. "Together, these efforts reflect the mission's goal of taking the offense to win hearts and minds by making the stories and bringing them to journalists – and not the other way around."

[In another](#), much more specific case of propaganda and control of disseminated information, [the US Embassy in Bahrain provided an "action request" to the Bahraini government](#) to lie about the treatment of an innocent Bahraini man in custody in the Guantánamo Bay detention facility.

Press reports published in October 2005 detailed [the torture and abuse of Bahraini detainee Juma al-Dossary](#), including forced nudity, sexual abuse, and solitary confinement without charge or trial. The reports noted that al Dossary, among others, had resorted to going on a hunger strike in response to his treatment.

In response to the media exposure of the mistreatment, the US Embassy contacted the Bahraini government to make an "action request" for "talking points" to relay to the Bahraini public and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Embassy has talking points on the hunger strikes," the cable reads "but requests talking points to respond publicly to questions about the treatment of al-Dossary, as well as any points that could be conveyed privately to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to the diplomatic note."

Shortly after this action request was made, [the Embassy put out a statement](#) denying that al-Dossary was abused or that he was kept in solitary confinement. The statement also claimed that al-Dossary had access to excellent medical care, and insisted that the treatment of detainees held in Guantánamo Bay were "humane."

As the release of these diplomatic cables prove, the US government undoubtedly engages in massive amounts of conscious deception in order to coax public opinion away from a reality-based understanding of US policy. The strategy is to spin media attention toward reporting that US policy mimics humanitarian concern, but not to actually move US policy in a more humanitarian direction.