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New WikiLeaks Documents Expose US Foreign Policy Conspiracies

by David Walsh

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The batch of 250,000 US classified documents released by WikiLeaks to several news outlets, some of whose content was made public Sunday, sheds new light on the sordid nature of American imperialist intrigue and conspiracy around the globe.

The WSWS will analyze the documents more thoroughly in a subsequent article, but “highlights” published by the Guardian and the New York Times are revealing.

The leaked material consists of classified cables from US embassies, some dispatched as recently as early 2010. The cables, most of which date from 2007-2010, contain US officials’ comments on foreign governments and leaders and speculation about the activities and maneuvers of the latter, as well as details about American foreign policy operations.

In a revelation that should surprise no one, the US State Department and American diplomacy in general turn out to be a vast nest of spies.

The Guardian explains that the WikiLeaks documents “reveal how the US uses its embassies as part of a global espionage network, with diplomats tasked to obtain not just information from the people they meet, but personal details, such as frequent flyer numbers, credit card details and even DNA material.

“Classified ‘human intelligence directives’ issued in the name of Hillary Clinton or her predecessor, Condoleezza Rice, instruct officials to gather information on military installations, weapons markings, vehicle details of political leaders as well as iris scans, fingerprints and DNA.”

The British newspaper reports that Washington’s “most controversial target was the leadership of the United Nations.” One of the leaked directives requests “the specification of telecoms and IT systems used by top UN officials and their staff and details of ‘private VIP networks used for official communication, to include upgrades, security measures, passwords, personal encryption keys.” In response, a UN spokesperson discreetly commented, “We are aware of the reports.”

Among other revelations: Officials from numerous Arab regimes have repeatedly urged the US to bomb Iran and destroy its nuclear program. The Financial Times, based on the documents, reports: “The Saudi ambassador to Washington ... spoke to General David Petraeus, then incoming central command chief, in April 2008 about King Abdullah’s ‘frequent exhortations to the US to attack Iran.’”

The reactionary Arab states “fear a nuclear-armed Iran would make it the undisputed superpower in the region, particularly at a time when the power of their own ally, the US, has receded.”

Moreover, notes the Financial Times, “The leaks will reinforce suspicions that Israel is considering an attack on Iranian facilities. According to reports of the cables, Ehud Barak, the defence minister, warned in 2009 that the world had six to 18 months to deal with Iran’s nuclear programme.”

The new WikiLeaks exposé also reveals that the US has been trying since 2007 “to remove from a Pakistani research reactor highly enriched uranium that American officials fear could be diverted for use in an illicit nuclear device.” (New York Times) For its part, the Pakistani regime is fearful that if the media were to get word of the fuel removal, they would portray it as the US taking Pakistan’s nuclear weapons.

The New York Times reports this gem as well: “When American diplomats pressed other countries to resettle detainees, they became reluctant players in a State Department version of ‘Let’s Make a Deal.’ Slovenia was told to take a prisoner if it wanted to meet with President Obama, while the island nation of Kiribati was offered incentives worth millions of dollars to take in Chinese Muslim detainees, cables from diplomats recounted. The Americans, meanwhile, suggested that accepting more prisoners would be ‘a low-cost way for Belgium to attain prominence in Europe.’”

US officials were thoroughly aware of the deep-going corruption of the Afghan government, the documents reveal. The Times reports that United Arab Emirates officials discovered that Afghan vice president Ahmed Zia Massoud was carrying \$52 million in cash when he tried to enter that country last year. According to one of the cables,

Massoud “was ultimately allowed to keep [the money] without revealing [its] origin or destination.”

The US government is outraged that the world’s population is getting a glimpse into its dirty operations. In a deeply hypocritical statement, the White House issued a statement Sunday denouncing WikiLeaks for its “reckless and dangerous action.” The press release claimed that WikiLeaks had “put at risk not only the cause of human rights but also the lives and work of these individuals [named in the documents].”

On the eve of the new release of documents, the US State Department wrote WikiLeaks a threatening letter, claiming that making the material publicly available was illegal and would “place at risk the lives of countless individuals.” The November 28 letter also asserted, without providing any proof, that the leaks would “place at risk on-going military operations,” and “place at risk on-going cooperation between countries.”

On Sunday afternoon, WikiLeaks reported that its web site had been compromised. “We are currently under a mass distributed denial of service attack,” WikiLeaks said on its Twitter page. A DDOS attack is an attempt to make a given web site unavailable to the public, usually by flooding it with requests for data.

The State Department letter, signed by legal adviser Harold Hongju Koh, was addressed to WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange and the latter’s lawyer, Jennifer Robinson. Assange and Robinson had written to Louis B. Susman, US ambassador to the United Kingdom, asking which individuals would be put at risk by the new disclosures and apparently offering limited redactions.

In his reply, Koh asserted that “We will not engage in a negotiation regarding the further release or dissemination of illegally obtained U.S. Government classified materials.” The State Department official’s letter has two indignant references to the “violation of U.S. law” involved in the documents being provided to WikiLeaks and that organization’s holding and publishing them.

The analogy hardly does justice to the present situation, but Koh’s effort might be likened to a Mafia hit man writing to an eyewitness of a mob slaying and complaining bitterly about his or her upcoming testimony. The US actions in Iraq and Afghanistan are criminal and murderous on a massive scale. WikiLeaks not only has the legal right, it has the moral obligation to do anything in its power to disrupt these bloody operations. It is to the everlasting shame of the mainstream media that it has not exerted any of its efforts along the same lines.

Washington attempted to weaken the impact of the WikiLeaks material by leaking its own story in regard to the material in the middle of last week. US officials and diplomats, including Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, have been scurrying about the past few days, attempting to alert and reassure some of the governments and leaders referred to in the documents.

By video link from an undisclosed location on Sunday, Assange told reporters that “The material that we are about to release covers essentially every major issue in every country.” The WikiLeaks founder faces trumped up sexual assault charges in Sweden.

Among the apparent revelations not yet to appear in the Guardian or the Times, which are releasing the material piecemeal, is that the US has for years supported the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, an organization that both Washington and Ankara have placed on their lists of “terrorist” groups.

Deborah Guido, spokeswoman for the US embassy in Ankara, told the media that the American government’s policy “has never been nor will ever be in support of the PKK. Anything that implies otherwise is nonsense.” Turkish commentators were more inclined to believe the report.

Mehmet Yegin, an expert at the Center for American Studies at the USAK research organization, suggested, according to the English-language version of the Turkish newspaper Hurriyet, “that U.S. support for the PKK could have been a result of Turkey’s decision in 2003 not to allow the United States to enter Iraq through Turkish soil.”

Some of the more sensitive material yet to be published involves the US-UK relationship. The US diplomatic cables reportedly include scathing remarks about British operations in Afghanistan and Prime Minister David Cameron. The Daily Mail in Britain reports: “The documents include highly damaging and embarrassing communiques from U.S. embassies around the world, especially from London--revealing the truth behind the so-called ‘special relationship’ between the U.K. and the U.S.

“The U.S. ambassador to London made an unprecedented personal visit to Downing Street [the British prime minister’s residence] to warn that whistleblower website WikiLeaks was about to publish secret assessments of what Washington really thinks of Britain.”

The global diplomatic crisis triggered by the WikiLeaks documents speaks to the extremely volatile international situation and the number of flashpoints, which do not require much fuel to be ignited.

Furthermore, that a small organization with a computer bank and sympathizers within the US military and intelligence apparatus can wreak such havoc is testimony to the decline of American imperialism and the chaos and disorientation that characterize its daily activities. The US foreign policy establishment lurches from one improvised and violent plan to the next, resentful and fearful of foes and “friends” alike.