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Al Jazeera

Sex, lies and diplomatic cables

12/6/2010

'Cablegate' has provided the Arab public with an insightful peek into the inner circles of their respective states.

Western diplomats may or may not always be lying for their own country. But could Western diplomacy, in the case of the Middle East, serve to make non-Western rulers lie to their own countries? The Wikileaks revelatory cables shed some light on this puzzle.

Knowledge is Power!

So did aver the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Indeed, a cliché phrase and the mantra of many in the modern world. The powerless know not what the powerful possess. In the Quran 'Knowledge is king' (sultan), differentiating between human beings not only according to piety – but also knowledge.

Only a dearth of knowledge is today available about what Arabs and Middle Easterners know about the inner 'thoughts' of their states. The affairs, sickness, near deaths, feuds, plots, deals, schemes and the personalities surrounding them are the exclusive bastion of the inner circles amongst ruling elites. So then, rumour is rife?

The region Middle Easterners inhabit is perennially constructed and re-constructed, and the government business is shrouded in secrecy - to such an extent that some narrators had the Arabs winning the catastrophic 1967 war when their armies were routed by the Israelis.

What use does Gaddafi have for his attractive bodyguards and a Ukrainian voluptuous nurse? How does Mohammed Dahlan, once a poor refugee camp inhabitant, upgrade quickly into a millionaire? As the Israelis mockingly note in reference to Mahmoud Abbas's son, how does he become so 'mysteriously rich'? Do some of them, such as in the case of Palestinian Fatah, use sexual entrapment to blackmail opponents?

Whose Middle East?

The thousands of cables made public by Wikileaks in as many weeks reveal a sinister side to Middle Eastern rule: Peace under Netanyahu is a chimera; Gamal inspires not strength, nor does Abbas; Western bets are on strongman Dahlan. Democracy under Bin Ali is wishful thinking! Nouri Al-Maliki's reign of terror is confirmed - but relax Maliki's saving grace is being on the side of the 'good guys'.

One might see flying saucers before witnessing Palestinian statehood, Tunisian or Iraqi democracy. If it is any consolation, they are apparently in the good company of France's Sarkozy – the 'emperor' reincarnate!

In a way the humour and meticulous notes of professional American and other Western diplomats, which is not by any stretch of the imagination earth-shattering is knowledge for the Arab multitude - despite being low-key cables with an informal and down-to-earth register.

That includes the stereotypes, the sarcasm, and even the condescending remarks. However that is also what makes them so fascinating – unedited diplomatic-speak! To an extent, they slightly reveal to the lay public how the 'West' in the tradition of Lord Kitchener and others, constructs the 'East'.

Clash of Languages, not clash of Interests

Going back to Foucault, the cables are a fragment of a discourse, text or speech. It is of course impressive by what it says as much as by what it does not say. One would like to visualise White House official Brennan listening to Arab rulers pontificating about former Gitmo detainees. Every grimace, every frown, lurking laughter, and the body language which the cables cannot vocalise, impart or describe. This is where the theatrics of diplomacy is let down by the cable medium.

Then there is the local imagery. The slithering sly hayyah (viper or snake) that is Iran, a euphemism which leapt from the mouth of King Abdullah, threatening the existing world order and perhaps Armageddon in the Middle East. This is the imagery of the desert. The monster of the desert is the viper – unseen, adept at camouflage and ambush, striking its prey with great speed whilst inflecting its poisonous venom.

In the Holy Quran, Moses fends off the Pharaoh and his sorcerers by turning his rod into a serpent. King Abdullah got the language of imagery right, but the politics wrong, by inciting war. Is being a Sunni nowadays solely definable by opposing Shias? Why bomb

Iran? Buy it. Isn't it the market that supposedly builds bridges between clashing interests? Investing in Iran is the route to normalisation. Probable friendship rather than probable enmity should be the stuff of diplomacy.

As ever, in the Middle East, one person's viper is another man's 'alpha dog'. Otherwise how does one explain that Abbas and Al-Salih, who collaborate in the bombing of their own peoples, are granted legitimacy, cash and weapons. Those who resist occupation are threatened with war and international courts!

The cables show linguistic cacophony, and, in terms of interests, harmony. Security, security, security! Terrorists, Gitmo detainees, Iranian nukes, Hamas, and Hezbollah are the addiction as well as the obsession of Middle Eastern diplomacy.

Kuwait's Rule of Law

The UK speaks strongly in the defence of its detainees in Guantanamo Bay and their legal rights. It is precisely the notion of legal rights and the law that seem to bother the Kuwaiti Interior Minister Jaber Khalid Al-Sabah in his conversation in early 2009 with the US Ambassador. That is, independent rule of law.

The legal system seems to protect individuals suspected of funding terrorism or freed terrorists. Who wants citizens if they cannot be oppressed with the help of the law of the land! His Excellency's solution to Kuwait's four detainees: more or less, convert them into some kind of badun (stateless Kuwaitis). Where? In the Middle of Afghanistan, in the inferno of a war! To be granted the lifetime opportunity of involuntary martyrdom.

Who is a terrorist? It seems your guess is as good as anyone's. The cables are saturated with speak of the terrorist peril, the tenor of modern diplomacy!

The Saudi monarch did not suggest throwing freed Gitmo detainees in the middle of the Empty Quarter, however White House's anti-terror adviser, John Brennan sounded bemused by the king's idea of embedding chips or tracking devices inside terrorists - such as in the case of horses and falcons - fortunately there was no mention of vipers on that specific occasion!

Brennan rightly replied that 'horses don't have good lawyers'. Nor do, of course, Gazans under siege!

Egypt & Assange's appalling Timing

If only the Egyptian people knew Mubarak's pearl of wisdom to forget about democracy (in Iraq) before November 28. The nation's coffers would have been better off directing the money for organising, policing, rigging, miscounting the vote towards some other public good. Building more bakeries.

Like father, like son. Gamal is well taught: 'forget about democracy'. The cables add, quoting Mubarak telling his US interlocutors, 'in Iraq'. But if Iraqis are Arabs and Egyptians are Arabs then it must have been obvious to Gamal that Iraqis are Egyptians.

For the record, President Mubarak 'gave' the Muslim Brethren 88 seats in 2005, Gamal nought in 2010. The next step: may be Gamal as 'a just dictator' akin to what Mubarak Senior wished for in Iraq.

'Cable-Gate' and Lebanon

This is a topic to be **carefully followed** by those with interest in the region. 'Cable-Gate' will gradually engulf Lebanon. US cables have Elias El-Murr, Lebanon's Defence Minister, advising Israel on how to re-invade and clean out Hezbollah successfully! With a Defence Minister like Mr El-Murr, who needs enemies!

The 'Old'-'New' Middle East

Still timelessly couched in intrigue and dressed as mystique. It is constructed of the same old elements – assassins-cum-terrorists... laced with flattery, 'thuggery', and even bribery, 'sexed' up with hints of tales from the Arabian nights in the Libyan desert. From Tel Aviv via the Levant on to the Gulf, Arab and Persian, war, security, and terrorism top the agendas of Global diplomacy. The global powers speak technology, trade, power-sharing and UN status in New Delhi and Beijing. In Tel Aviv, Damascus, Riyadh and Cairo they talk security.

The US embassy cables show Western diplomats pursuing with dedication their people's interests. For that they must be respected. By contrast, some Arab politicians are inviting invasion, bombing and conspiring against fellow citizens. May be Arabs today must ask not only how they are ruled, but also by whom.