



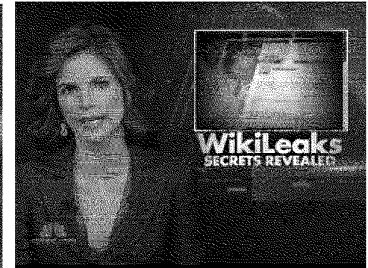
MEDIA COVERAGE | WIKILEAKS RELEASE OF STATE DEPARTMENT CABLES

RELEASE IN FULL

NOVEMBER 29, 2010 As of 0430

Summary

Media coverage of WikiLeaks' release of classified U.S. State Department cables remains heavy across all mediums. Reports underscored that the leaked documents provide candid views of foreign leaders and blunt assessments on terrorism and nuclear proliferation filed by U.S. diplomats. Attention centered on new revelations about "long-simmering" nuclear trouble spots, detailing U.S., Israeli and Arab world fears of Iran's growing nuclear program, American concerns about Pakistan's atomic arsenal and U.S. discussions about a united Korean peninsula as a long-term solution to North Korean aggression. However, coverage also italicized that most of the revelations were not "explosive" nor would "shatter any international relationships."



Print, online, and wire coverage consisted of official condemnation of the release of leaked documents and stories detailing the contents of the cables, including reports that U.S. diplomats were encouraged to spy on counterparts at the U.N. and information about various countries including China, North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel, Yemen, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Reporters emphasized that the documents illustrate how frightened the Arab world is of Iran's rising ambitions and its nuclear program -- and how much Iran has become the center of attention in capitals around the world. In the wake of the release, the press added that to prevent further breaches, the Pentagon announced Sunday it had ordered the disabling of a feature on its classified computer systems that allows material to be copied onto thumb drives or other removable devices.

Among the five media groups to receive the documents prior to WikiLeaks release -- America's New York Times, Britain's The Guardian, Germany's Der Spiegel, France's Le Monde, and Spain's El País and -- the Times has been heavily referenced, with the issues it covered influencing the direction of the overall coverage. Coverage by Agence France Presse has been extensive. Broadcast coverage consisted of both brief "readers" as well as full reports on the release of the State Department documents.

Highlights

Characterization of the Leak

- Agence France Presse: Whistleblower website WikiLeaks on Sunday unleashed a flood of US cables detailing shocking diplomatic episodes, from a nuclear standoff with Pakistan to Arab leaders urging a strike on Iran... In an introduction, it painted the United States as a hypocritical superpower and attacked "the contradictions between the US's public persona and what it says behind closed doors.
- Associated Press: Hundreds of thousands of State Department documents leaked Sunday revealed a hidden world of backstage international diplomacy, divulging candid comments from world leaders and detailing occasional U.S. pressure tactics aimed at hot spots in Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea... None of the revelations is particularly explosive, but their publication could prove problematic for the officials concerned. And the massive release of material intended for diplomatic eyes only is sure to ruffle feathers in foreign capitals, a certainty that prompted U.S. diplomats to scramble in recent days to shore up relations with key allies in advance of the disclosures.

- Reuters: The diplomatic cables so far released by WikiLeaks might embarrass U.S. diplomats but probably won't shatter any international relationships... The key lesson so far seems to be just how much easier the information age has made it to steal vast quantities of data -- and how much harder it is to keep secrets.
- McClatchy: However, the cables' blunt language and their unvarnished statements of U.S. positions on a wide range of issues as well as internal U.S. assessments of world leaders could prove highly embarrassing, hurt ties with allies and other countries and diminish trust in Washington's ability to safeguard secrets. The first tranche of documents, released by WikiLeaks, the whistle-blowing website, didn't contain any explosive revelations, although a cable outlining U.S. efforts to convince China to stop commercial air shipments of North Korean missile parts to Iran via Beijing appeared to divulge a top-secret U.S. intelligence operation.

Mideast

- Wall Street Journal: U.S. diplomats and defense officials have worried the disclosures could undercut the ability of foreign leaders to continue cooperating with Washington on counter-terror and counter-proliferation operations, with Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan among those most focused on.

Iran

- Agence France Presse: The United States has told France that Israel could strike Iran without US military support but the operation might not be successful, according to a leaked document published Sunday.
- Agence France Presse: Israel has warned its US ally that President Barack Obama's attempt to engage diplomatically with Iran over its nuclear weapons program will fail, according to leaked memos published Sunday.
- Bloomberg: Iran obtained 19 advanced missiles from North Korea, potentially giving the Islamic nation the capability of attacking Moscow and cities in Western Europe, according to embassy cables posted by WikiLeaks.org and provided to the New York Times.
- Los Angeles Times: Leaders of oil-rich Arabian Peninsula monarchies who are publicly reluctant to criticize Iran have been beseeching the United States in private to attack the Islamic Republic and destroy its nuclear facilities, according to a series of classified diplomatic cables released by the WikiLeaks website.
- New York Times: These warnings are part of a trove of diplomatic cables reaching back to the genesis of the Iranian nuclear standoff in which leaders from around the world offer their unvarnished opinions about how to negotiate with, threaten and perhaps force Iran's leaders to renounce their atomic ambitions.
- Reuters: King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia repeatedly exhorted the United States to "cut off the head of the snake" by launching military strikes to destroy Iran's nuclear program, according to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables.
- Washington Post: The United States believes Iran has obtained advanced missiles from North Korea that could reach Moscow and cities across Western Europe, one of several secret diplomatic assessments of Iran's weapons program disclosed publicly for the first time Sunday.

Pakistan

- Agence France Presse: The United States has led top secret efforts to remove highly enriched uranium from Pakistan for years, worried it could be used to make an "illicit" nuclear device, according to leaked US cables.
- Washington Post: The latest document dump from WikiLeaks reveals the diplomatic high wire the United States is often walking in its relationship with countries that are considered crucial allies in fighting terrorism, such as Pakistan. Cables that pertain to the U.S. relationship with Pakistan show the extent to which U.S. diplomatic officials think the American agenda is often undermined by the poor standing of the superpower among Pakistanis.

Yemen

- Agence France Presse: Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh admits lying to his own people by pretending that US military strikes against Al-Qaeda are carried out by Yemeni forces, according to a leaked US document.
- Wall Street Journal: Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh allowed American forces to conduct counter-terror operations against al Qaeda militants inside his country. During a January meeting with visiting U.S. Gen. David Petraeus, the Yemeni leader made clear he wanted to disguise Washington's role, according to a cable from the American ambassador in Sana'a.

Afghanistan

- Bloomberg: The leaked documents include details about governments and officials, including an episode last year in which Afghanistan's then-vice president, Ahmed Zia Massoud, was found carrying \$52 million in cash while visiting the United Arab Emirates. Massoud denied taking any money out of Afghanistan, according to the Times.
- Agence France Presse: Leaked US documents on Monday painted President Hamid Karzai's controversial younger brother as a corrupt drugs baron, exposing deep US concerns about graft undermining the war against the Afghan Taliban... Ahmed Wali Karzai has long been dogged by allegations of unsavory links to Afghanistan's lucrative opium trade and private security firms. But as a powerful figure in Kandahar, where US forces are leading the fight to break a nine-year Taliban insurgency, Western officials have kept quiet in public on the president's younger half brother's tainted record. Leaked cables from the US embassy in Kabul now reveal their true feelings in moves that could complicate already strained relations between Washington and Karzai at a key juncture in the war.

Iraq

- Agence France Presse: Iranians applying for diplomatic visas to Iraq were vetted by the US embassy in Baghdad for as long as 16 months before their application was decided upon, a leaked US document showed Monday.

Turkey

- Reuters: U.S. diplomats have cast doubts on the reliability of NATO ally Turkey, portraying its leadership as divided and permeated by Islamists, according to the German Der Spiegel magazine's website.

Israel

- Agence France Presse: Israel discussed its planned war on Gaza with the Palestinian leadership and Egypt ahead of time, offering to hand them control of the strip if it defeated Hamas, US documents released by WikiLeaks showed.

Asia

China

- Agence France Presse: The United States believes that China's leadership has directed a hacking campaign into computers of Google and Western governments, according to US diplomatic files leaked Sunday.
- Agence France Presse: The United States confronted China on information it tried to pressure Kyrgyzstan to pull the rug from a US base, possibly due to a dispute over Guantanamo detainees, a leaked document said Sunday.
- Reuters: The United States has complained to Beijing several times over the transshipment of missile components from North Korea to Iran via China, the Guardian newspaper reported.
- Wall Street Journal: The cables reflect continuing U.S. concern that China isn't doing enough to prevent proliferation of missile and chemical weapons technology despite Beijing's introduction of export controls in 2002... The cables also highlight U.S. concerns about China's computer warfare capability, and its influence in Central Asia. And they give potentially embarrassing blow-by-blow accounts of meetings between U.S. and Chinese officials.

□

Koreas

- Agence France Presse: South Korea believes that the offer of commercial deals could help a reluctant China get on board the idea of Korean reunification, according to US diplomatic cables cited by the New York Times.
- Reuters: Separately, the New York Times said the leaked cables showed that U.S. and South Korean officials have discussed the prospects for a unified Korea, should the North's economic troubles and political transition lead the state to implode.

Americas

- Agence France Presse: Washington ordered its diplomats in 2008 to probe a possible Al-Qaeda presence in a border zone between Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, according to a confidential cable released Sunday by WikiLeaks.
- McClatchy: The events surrounding the June 2009 coup in Honduras was a carnival of illegal actions by every branch of government, including the successor of the deposed president, according to a diplomatic cable signed by the U.S. ambassador.

Europe

- Agence France Presse: The United States voiced concern to France earlier this year over the possible sale of a French warship to Russia, saying it sent a "mixed signal" to both Moscow and Eastern European allies, according to a leaked US document published Sunday.

Intelligence

- Agence France Presse: The United States has ordered its diplomats to play a larger intelligence role by performing espionage work like obtaining the credit card and frequent flyer numbers of foreign dignitaries, according to leaked US documents published Sunday.
- Los Angeles Times: U.S. diplomats have been directed by Washington to gather detailed data on their foreign counterparts, including the kinds of information usually sought by spies, according to diplomatic cables made public Sunday.

Reactions - Government/International Organizations**United States**

- Agence France Presse: The White House hit back, saying the release was a "reckless and dangerous action" that put lives in danger... The Pentagon, which was infuriated by the website's publication of secret Afghanistan and Iraq war logs earlier this year, also condemned the latest, more far-reaching release and unveiled new steps to prevent future leaks.
- Hill: The White House condemned "in the strongest terms" Sunday the anticipated leak of three million classified documents, including hundreds of thousands of State Department cables that have sent the administration scrambling to stem the damage in advance.

World

- Agence France Presse: The United Nations said Sunday that it relies on member states to respect immunities granted to the world body, in its first statement on leaked documents which told how US officials were ordered its officials to spy on the UN leadership.
- Agence France Presse: Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari criticized the release of confidential US diplomatic cables by Internet whistleblower WikiLeaks as "very, very unhelpful" on Monday.
- Associated Press: Pakistan on Monday criticized the release of classified U.S. diplomatic cables that reportedly raise concerns that highly enriched uranium could be diverted from its nuclear program to build an illicit weapon.
- Agence France Presse: Israel reacted calmly Monday to the release of a massive trove of US diplomatic cables by whistleblower website WikiLeaks, saying they showed the Jewish state's consistent concern about Iran.
- Agence France Presse: The slow release of thousands of US diplomatic documents by WikiLeaks is a "threat to democratic authority", French government spokesman Francois Baroin told Europe 1 radio on Monday.
- Agence France Presse: New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said Monday he expected some embarrassing fallout when US diplomatic cables from Wellington are released by whistleblower website WikiLeaks.
- Agence France Presse: Canada said Sunday that WikiLeaks' release of thousands of US diplomatic cables was 'irresponsible' and could threaten national security.
- Associated Press: Pakistan has criticized the release of classified U.S. diplomatic cables that reportedly raise concerns about the country's nuclear program.

Views on Foreign Leaders

- Agence France Presse: Diplomats are by definition known for the niceties of their public statements, but leaked documents out Sunday show that US officials can be merciless in their assessments behind closed doors... The thousands of secret cables released by the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks feature unflattering descriptions of the leaders of both US allies and adversaries.
- Agence France Presse: Veteran Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi fears flying over water, prefers staying on the ground floor and almost never travels without his trusted Ukrainian nurse, a "voluptuous blond," according to a US document released Sunday by WikiLeaks.
- Agence France Presse: Britain's Guardian newspaper Monday promised it would release leaked memos in which US officials offer "embarrassing" assessments of Prime Minister David Cameron and "weak" ex-leader Gordon Brown.

- ❑ Agence France Presse: The top US diplomat in Rome found Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to be an "ineffective" leader who wastes his energy on parties, according to US documents leaked by WikiLeaks.
- ❑ Agence France Presse: French President Nicolas Sarkozy's senior diplomatic advisor branded Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez "crazy" in talks with top US officials, according to a diplomatic cable leaked Sunday.
- ❑ Agence France Presse: Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks to German news magazine Der Spiegel include embarrassingly frank US assessments of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is described as a weak leader.
- ❑ Reuters: U.S. diplomats describe German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle as arrogant, vain and critical of America, documents released on Sunday by whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks showed.
- ❑ EUobserver.com: American diplomats speak about EU leaders in terms of "Teflon Merkel," "authoritarian Sarkozy" and a "feckless, vain and ineffective Berlusconi" who is a "mouthpiece" for Russia, a first batch of secret cables sent to and from US embassies abroad and published by WikiLeaks shows.
- ❑ Hill: French President Nicolas Sarkozy is referred to as a "naked emperor," while Afghan President Hamid Karzai is said to be "driven by paranoia."

Newspapers Defend Publication of Leaked Diplomatic Memos

- ❑ Agence France Presse: The New York Times, The Guardian and Le Monde on Sunday defended their decision to publish hundreds of secret US diplomatic memos obtained by WikiLeaks while voluntarily withholding certain information.
- ❑ Altnet: The job of the media is not to protect power from embarrassment... Clearly, it is for governments, not journalists, to protect public secrets. Were there some overriding national jeopardy in revealing them, greater restraint might be in order. There is no such overriding jeopardy, except from the policies themselves as revealed. Where it is doing the right thing, a great power should be robust against embarrassment.

Pentagon – Information Control

- ❑ Bloomberg: The Pentagon said yesterday it will take action to prevent future reoccurrences, such as monitoring user behavior in a way similar to steps taken by credit-card companies to detect fraud. The military will also conduct security oversight inspections at forward bases and remove the ability of classified computers to download information onto removable disks.
- ❑ Politico: The Pentagon on Sunday announced new approaches for how it would safeguard information in the wake of the leak of documents from WikiLeaks, amid allegations that the Obama administration went too far in improving information-sharing across the government.

WikiLeaks

- ❑ Agence France Presse: WikiLeaks evaded a massive cyber attack Sunday to begin posting hundreds of thousands of classified US diplomatic documents, the whistleblower organization said.
- ❑ Associated Press: Attorney-General Robert McClelland says police are investigating whether any Australian law has been broken by the latest leaking of confidential documents by online whistle-blower WikiLeaks.
- ❑ Associated Press: The online website WikiLeaks on Sunday blamed the temporary outage of its site on a denial-of-service attack by unknown hackers trying to prevent its release of hundreds of thousands of classified U.S. State Department documents... James Lewis, a cybersecurity expert and a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said it's unlikely the U.S. or some other government would use denial-of-service attacks against WikiLeaks.

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WIRES

Iran smuggled arms to Hezbollah on ambulances: WikiLeaks - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Not attributed

Iran used Red Crescent ambulances to smuggle weapons and agents into Lebanon during Hezbollah's 2006 war with Israel, a leaked US diplomatic cable showed on Monday.

The 2008 classified cable which originated in Dubai quotes an Iranian source as saying the Iranian Red Crescent was used as a cover by members of the elite Revolutionary Guard to enter Lebanon during the conflict.

"IRC shipments of medical supplies served also to facilitate weapons shipments," said the cable that appeared on the whistleblower website WikiLeaks.

It added Red Crescent staff had seen "missiles in the planes destined for Lebanon when delivering medical supplies to the plane.

"The plane was allegedly half full prior to the arrival of any medical supplies," the cable said.

The Iranian source also said an IRC hospital in Lebanon was handed over to the control of Hezbollah at the request of Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of the Shiite party.

Israel and the United States have long accused Iran of supplying military and financial backing to Hezbollah.

A party official reached by AFP had no immediate comment on the leaked US cable, which was among more than 250,000 documents that WikiLeaks released on Sunday.

The 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel killed 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

WikiLeaks 'threat to democratic authority': France - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Not attributed

The slow release of thousands of US diplomatic documents by WikiLeaks is a "threat to democratic authority", French government spokesman Francois Baroin told Europe 1 radio on Monday.

"We stand united with the US administration on the desire to avoid that which not only damages states' authority, the quality of their services, but puts men and women who have worked in the service of the country in danger," he said.

"We have to be very attentive and united at a state level to fight against what is a threat to democratic authority and sovereignty," he said, following the release of the often secret and frequently embarrassing diplomatic cables.

"The protection of states is something serious, it's about the protection of men, of women, of citizens," Baroin said, adding: "I've always thought that a transparent society is a totalitarian society."

Potentially embarrassing cables for France include an account of a senior advisor to French President Nicolas Sarkozy branding Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez "crazy" and Iran a "fascist state".

WikiLeaks unleashes a flood of damaging US cables - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Joseph Krauss

Whistleblower website WikiLeaks has unleashed a flood of US cables detailing shocking diplomatic episodes, from a nuclear standoff with Pakistan to Arab leaders urging a strike on Iran.

The leaked memos describe a Chinese government bid to hack into Google; plans to reunite the Korean peninsula after the North's eventual collapse; Saudi Arabia's king's call to the US to bomb Iran to halt its nuclear drive.

The confidential cables, most of which date from 2007 to February this year, also reveal how the State Department has ordered diplomats to spy on foreign officials and even to obtain their credit card and frequent flier numbers.

The memos, released on Sunday, recount closed-door remarks such as Yemen's president telling a top US general: "We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours" when discussing secretive US strikes on Al-Qaeda.

A description of Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi said he required the near-constant assistance of a "voluptuous blond" Ukrainian nurse.

The Guardian newspaper reported that a classified directive sent to US diplomats under US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's name in July 2009 sought technical details about the communications systems used by top UN officials.

The directive also sought intelligence on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's "management and decision-making style," said to the report.

UN officials declined to comment.

In another document, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates told his French counterpart that Israel could strike Iran without US military support but the operation might not be successful.

The New York Times, Britain's The Guardian, Germany's Der Spiegel, France's Le Monde and Spain's El Pais published the first batch of the documents on Sunday, saying more would follow in the coming days.

WikiLeaks chief Julian Assange described the release as a "diplomatic history of the United States" that would cover "every major issue."

Despite coming under a cyber attack that took down its main website earlier in the day, WikiLeaks started publishing the 251,287 cables -- 15,652 of which are classified "secret" -- from 274 US embassies around the world on a sub-website <http://cablegate.wikileaks.org>.

In an introduction, it painted the United States as a hypocritical superpower and attacked "the contradictions between the US's public persona and what it says behind closed doors."

The White House hit back, saying the release was a "reckless and dangerous action" that put lives in danger.

"To be clear -- such disclosures put at risk our diplomats, intelligence professionals, and people around the world who come to the United States for assistance in promoting democracy and open government," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said in a statement.

The Pentagon, already infuriated by the website's publication of secret Afghanistan and Iraq war logs earlier this year, unveiled new steps to prevent future leaks.

US officials had raced to contain the diplomatic fallout by warning more than a dozen governments of the impending leaks, but Washington refused to negotiate with WikiLeaks, saying it had obtained the cables illegally.

Assange has denied the release of the documents placed individuals at risk.

"As far as we are aware, and as far as anyone has ever alleged in any credible manner whatsoever, no single individual has ever come to harm as a result of anything that we have ever published," he said Sunday.

The New York Times explained its decision to publish the cables by saying they "serve an important public interest."

The newspaper said it had "taken care to exclude... information that would endanger confidential informants or compromise national security".

It had consulted White House officials on sensitive issues but reserved the final decision to itself, it said.

The Guardian said all five papers had decided "neither to 'dump' the entire dataset into the public domain, nor to publish names that would endanger innocent individuals."

None of the countries at the heart of the most explosive revelations had responded publicly to the leaks by late Sunday.

But one Saudi government advisor told AFP: "The whole thing is very negative.

"It's not good for confidence-building," he said on condition of anonymity.

US officials have not confirmed the source of the leaks, but suspicion has fallen on Bradley Manning, a former army intelligence agent arrested after the release of a video showing air strikes that killed reporters in Iraq.

WikiLeaks argues that the first two document dumps -- nearly 500,000 US military incident reports from 2004 to 2009 -- shed light on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Iranian diplomats to Iraq vetted by US: WikiLeaks – 11/29

Agence France Presse / Not attributed

Iranians applying for diplomatic visas to Iraq were vetted by the US embassy in Baghdad for as long as 16 months before their application was decided upon, a leaked US document showed Monday.

The diplomatic cable, part of a tranche of a quarter of a million secret US files published by Internet whistleblower website Wikileaks, said that American vetting showed a fifth of applicants had possible ties to Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) or its ministry of intelligence.

"Since 2008, the MFA (ministry of foreign affairs) has passed names of Iranians applying for diplomatic visas to the US Embassy for vetting," the cable, dated April 2009 and sent from the US embassy in Baghdad, said.

"Background checks have revealed that about 20 percent have possible ties to the IRGC or Iran's ministry of intelligence and security ... The MFA has informed us that it denies visas to all new suspected intelligence officers, but we have not been able to verify such claims."

It continues: "In January 2009, the MFA passed a list of 35 names to the USG (US government) of Iranian diplomats already in country before the vetting process began. Of those, eight had ties to IRGC or MOIS."

The cable does not give any further details of the vetting process, when specifically in 2008 it began, or whether it was an ongoing programme.

Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Labid Abawi told AFP, however, that the information in the cable was "not accurate", and denied that any such vetting process ever took place.

A US embassy spokesman, meanwhile, declined to comment on the cable.

"The Department of State does not comment on materials, including classified documents, which may have been leaked," Aaron Snipe, a spokesman for the US embassy in Baghdad, said via e-mail when asked whether the vetting process was still being used.

"Any unauthorised disclosure of classified information by Wikileaks has harmful implications for the lives of identified individuals that are jeopardised, but also for global engagement among and between nations.

"Given its potential impact, we condemn such unauthorised disclosures and are taking every step to prevent future security breaches."

Wikileaks release 'very unhelpful': Iraq foreign minister - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Not attributed

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari criticised the release of confidential US diplomatic cables by Internet whistleblower Wikileaks as "very, very unhelpful" on Monday.

WikiLeaks has started to release a quarter of a million confidential US diplomatic cables, detailing embarrassing and inflammatory episodes in what the White House has condemned as a "reckless and dangerous action."

"These releases are very, very unhelpful," Zebari told AFP by telephone.

"We are going through a critical time (in Iraq), trying to form the long-awaited government. We hope it will not poison the overall atmosphere among Iraqi politicians and Iraqi leaders."

Zebari said he had not seen the specific cables released by Wikileaks.

The cables related to Iraq so far paint a picture of US interest in Iranian involvement in Iraq, from alleged support of Iraqi political parties by Tehran to perceived attempts by the Islamic republic to undermine Iraq's economy.

WikiLeaks show consistent concern on Iran: Israel - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Not attributed

Israel reacted calmly Monday to the release of a massive trove of US diplomatic cables by whistleblower website WikiLeaks, saying they showed the Jewish state's consistent concern about Iran.

"We come out looking very good," a senior government official told AFP on condition of anonymity, adding his assessment was only preliminary and came before the full set of leaked documents were released.

The cables "demonstrate that Israel doesn't speak a double language and that we say in private what we say in public" about the threat of Iran's nuclear programme, he added.

Many of the documents released so far detail tense discussions between the United States and regional allies over Iran's nuclear drive, which Tehran says is for peaceful energy purposes but which many suspect masks a weapons drive.

"They confirm that the whole Middle East is terrified by the prospect of a nuclear Iran. The Arab countries are pushing the United States towards military action more forcefully than Israel," the Israeli official added.

The documents posted online by WikiLeaks and a select group of international media outlets on Sunday show widespread concern about Iran's nuclear programme and reveal Saudi Arabia "repeatedly" urged a US military strike on the country.

The cables confirm Israel's publicly stated fears about Tehran's nuclear intentions, but reveal Arab regimes openly called on Washington to attack Iran.

In one published by the New York Times, Saudi King Abdullah was said to have called for decisive US action on Iran during a meeting with US ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and US General David Petraeus in April 2008.

"He told you to 'cut off the head of the snake'," Saudi Arabia's US ambassador Adel al-Jubeir told the US embassy in Riyadh two days after the high-level talks.

Karzai's brother 'corrupt drugs baron' US says: WikiLeaks – 11/29

Agence France Presse | Claire Truscott

Leaked US documents on Monday painted President Hamid Karzai's controversial younger brother as a corrupt drugs baron, exposing deep US concerns about graft undermining the war against the Afghan Taliban.

Internet whistleblower WikiLeaks has started to release quarter of a million confidential US diplomatic cables, detailing embarrassing and inflammatory episodes in what the White House has condemned as a "reckless and dangerous action".

Ahmed Wali Karzai has long been dogged by allegations of unsavoury links to Afghanistan's lucrative opium trade and private security firms.

But as a powerful figure in Kandahar, where US forces are leading the fight to break a nine-year Taliban insurgency, Western officials have kept quiet in public on the president's younger half brother's tainted record.

Leaked cables from the US embassy in Kabul now reveal their true feelings in moves that could complicate already strained relations between Washington and Karzai at a key juncture in the war.

"While we must deal with AWK (Ahmed Wali Karzai) as the head of the provincial council, he is widely understood to be corrupt and a narcotics trafficker," said one note that followed a meeting between the president's brother and US envoy Frank Ruggiero in September 2009.

Of the meeting itself, the report said Karzai "dressed in a crisp white shalwar kameez and pinstriped vest, appeared nervous, though eager to express his views on the international presence in Kandahar."

Kandahar is a make-or-break battleground in the US-led fight to defeat the insurgency, where the United States has poured in thousands of extra troops to wrest the initiative from the Taliban and bolster the Afghan government.

In May, British Major General Nick Carter, then NATO commander in southern Afghanistan, had said that he hoped Karzai -- chairman of the legislative council -- would cede power to the governor of the province, Tooryalai Wesa.

Afghanistan is ranked one of the most corrupt countries in the world, where official graft undermines public support for the Western-backed government and is believed to help fuel support for the Taliban insurgency.

"The meeting with AWK highlights one of our major challenges in Afghanistan: how to fight corruption and connect the people to their government, when the key government officials are themselves corrupt," the report acknowledged.

In the 2009 meeting with American and Canadian officials, the president's brother urged the allies not to fund small-scale cash projects -- a cornerstone of its counter-insurgency strategy -- but to build large mega-projects instead.

"Given AWK's reputation for shady dealings, his recommendations for large, costly infrastructure projects should be viewed with a healthy dose of scepticism," the report said.

"We will continue to urge AWK to improve his own credibility gap," said the report.

Karzai, who also runs his own private militia in the province, is reported to have said the plethora of independent security firms run by different men in the region should be brought under the control of one man.

The cable noted: "AWK is understood to have a stake in private security contracting, and has aggressively lobbied the Canadians to have his security services retained."

The report said that both Karzai and Wesa had tried to influence the awarding of contracts in the province.

Karzai also showed disdain for democratic elections in the region, the report said, insisting that local elders were better placed to provide governance for the area.

In a second meeting in February, Karzai told Ruggiero that he was willing to take a polygraph test to prove his innocence over claims of his involvement in the opium trade.

"He appears not to understand the level of our knowledge of his activities, and that the coalition views many of his activities as malign, particularly relating to his influence over the police," said the cable.

"We will need to monitor his activity closely...."

President Karzai has another brother, Mahmood Karzai, a former restaurant owner in the United States who is being investigated for tax evasion, according to a report in The Washington Post last month.

The Afghan government gave no immediate comment over the leaked documents.

Israel tried to coordinate Gaza war with Abbas, Cairo: leaks - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Not attributed

Israel discussed its planned war on Gaza with the Palestinian leadership and Egypt ahead of time, offering to hand them control of the strip if it defeated Hamas, US documents released by WikiLeaks showed.

The attempt to coordinate its devastating offensive against Gaza's Islamist rulers was revealed by Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak whose remarks were included in a telegram sent in June 2009 by then deputy US ambassador Luis Moreno.

"He explained that the GOI (government of Israel) had consulted with Egypt and Fatah prior to Operation Cast Lead, asking if they were willing to assume control of Gaza once Israel defeated Hamas," he said, referring to the Fatah party of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

"Not surprisingly, Barak said, the GOI received negative answers from both," it said.

Israel launched its massive offensive, dubbed "Operation Cast Lead," on December 27, 2008 with the stated aim of halting rocket attacks from Gaza.

During the 22-day war, some 1,400 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed in the fighting. Thirteen Israelis were also killed, 10 of them soldiers.

Barak also "stressed the importance of continued consultations with both Egypt and Fatah," over reconstruction of the tiny coastal enclave which was devastated by the operation.

The Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas have long been bitter rivals, but their divisions came to a head in June 2007 when Hamas drove its Fatah rivals out of the Gaza Strip and seized control of the impoverished territory.

Dangerous US standoff with Pakistan over nuclear fuel: leaks - 11/29

Agence France Presse / Masroor Gilani

The United States has led top secret efforts to remove highly enriched uranium from Pakistan for years, worried it could be used to make an "illicit" nuclear device, according to leaked US cables.

The New York Times said they were among quarter of a million confidential American diplomatic cables released by whistleblower WikiLeaks in what Pakistan condemned as an "irresponsible disclosure of sensitive official documents".

The country's nuclear arsenal is one of the most sensitive topics for the United States as it tries to improve relations with the conservative Muslim nation on the front line in the campaign against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Parts of Pakistan's northwest is gripped by a homegrown Taliban insurgency. Its semi-autonomous wild border area with Afghanistan is subject to a covert US drone war targeting Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders.

Islamist militants embarked on a nationwide bombing campaign across Pakistan in 2007, the same year that the Times said the secret efforts began.

In May 2009, it quoted then US ambassador Anne Patterson as saying that Pakistan was refusing to schedule a visit by American technical experts.

The Times attributed the reason to a nameless Pakistani official who said: "If the local media got word of the fuel removal, 'they certainly would portray it as the United States taking Pakistan's nuclear weapons'".

Islamabad has been adamant that its nuclear weapons are in safe hands and US President Barack Obama has publicly concurred.

But the Times said the leaked documents showed the United States trying to remove the uranium from a research reactor, fearing it could be diverted for use in an "illicit nuclear device".

The newspaper did not elaborate on how the United States had sought to remove the uranium or the nature of any such device.

Experts estimate that Pakistan already has up to 100 nuclear weapons.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said it had been officially informed of the leaks by the US government in advance.

"At this stage we are examining the relevant documents and their contents," ministry spokesman Abdul Basit told AFP when asked about the Times report.

The United States has longstanding concerns about proliferation from Pakistan and is reported to have set up an elite squad that could fly into the country and attempt to secure its weapons should the government disintegrate.

Pakistan announced that it had nuclear weapons in 1998, scrambling to secure the technology after India's first nuclear test in 1974.

Western analysts believe China assisted Pakistan in developing the Khushab nuclear site to produce plutonium, which can be miniaturised for cruise missiles -- presumably aimed at India.

In 2004, Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan's bomb, confessed to running a nuclear black market that sent secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea. He was put under house arrest for five years.

Although he retracted his remarks, US officials say he is still a risk.

Pakistan also opposes a proposed Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, which would limit access to highly enriched uranium and plutonium used to make weapons.

Pakistan says the treaty would give a permanent nuclear imbalance to India, with which it has fought three full-fledged wars since independence in 1947.

UN makes no comment on Wikileaks revelations - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

The United Nations said Sunday that it relies on member states to respect immunities granted to the world body, in its first statement on leaked documents which told how US officials were ordered its officials to spy on the UN leadership.

"The UN is not in a position to comment on the authenticity of the document purporting to request information-gathering activities on UN officials and activities," a UN spokesman said in a statement, after a first batch of documents released by the WikiLeaks website were reported by newspapers.

Britain's Guardian newspaper said a State Department directive sent in July sought intelligence on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's "management and decision-making style".

The government also asked for credit card numbers, email addresses, phone, fax and pager numbers and even frequent-flyer account numbers for UN officials, the daily added.

"The UN is by its very nature a transparent organization that makes a great deal of information about its activities available to the public and member states," the UN spokesman said in the statement.

"UN officials regularly meet representatives of member states to brief them on UN activities."

The statement said the UN Charter, an agreement under which the headquarters was based in New York and the 1946 United Nations Convention guarantee "the privileges and immunities of the organization.

"The UN relies on the adherence by member states to these various undertakings," said the statement which did not mention the United States by name.

Kadhafi never without 'voluptuous' nurse: WikiLeaks - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Dan De Luce

Veteran Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi fears flying over water, prefers staying on the ground floor and almost never travels without his trusted Ukrainian nurse, a "voluptuous blond," according to a US document released Sunday by WikiLeaks.

Kadhafi's eccentric and unpredictable personality is described with relish in the State Department cable, which was posted on the New York Times website, a small sampling of the more than 250,000 documents unveiled by WikiLeaks on Sunday despite Washington's protests.

The cable from September 2009 describes how Kadhafi's preferences for shorter flights and accommodation on the ground floor created logistical headaches for his staff, and that the Libyan leader never traveled without a certain Ukrainian nurse at his side.

Kadhafi had a team of nurses and "relies heavily on his long-time Ukrainian nurse, Galyna Kolotnytska, who has been described as a 'voluptuous blond,'" said a secret cable from the Tripoli embassy dated September 29, 2009, written by the US ambassador, Gene Cretz.

One source, whose name was blacked out by the Times, tells the US embassy that Kadhafi cannot travel without Kolotnytska, "as she alone 'knows his routine,'" it said.

"Some embassy contacts have claimed that Qadhafi and the 38 year-old Kolotnytska have a romantic relationship," it said.

"While he did not comment on such rumors, a Ukrainian political officer recently confirmed that the Ukrainian nurses 'travel everywhere with the Leader.'"

The cable was written after US officials had discussed arrangements for the Libyan leader's visit to New York last year to address the UN General Assembly.

After the nurse's travel paperwork was delayed, the Libyan government arranged a private jet to fetch her so she could join Kadhafi and his entourage in Portugal, where the leader spent the night en route to New York, according to the document.

During his visit, his first to the United States, Kadhafi was not allowed to set up his customary tent in Manhattan or to visit the site of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

According to other documents cited by the New York Times which were not posted on the paper's website, Kadhafi was so angered by his reception in New York that he threatened to break a pledge to return enriched uranium to Russia.

The US ambassador to Libya told the leader's son "that the Libyan government had chosen a very dangerous venue to express its pique," said the cable, quoted by the Times.

The September 29 cable said Kadhafi is "almost obsessively dependent on a small core of trusted personnel" who handle every detail.

The leader's "dislike of long flights and apparent fear of flying over water also caused logistical headaches for his staff" prior to the New York visit, the document said.

For his US trip, Kadhafi flew to Portugal and stayed the night, as a source said he "cannot fly more than eight hours" and that Kadhafi "does not like to fly over water."

US diplomats were also told that Kadhafi "must stay on the first floor of any facility that was rented for him" and that the leader "could not climb more than 35 steps."

This was the reason why Libyan officials chose an official residence in New Jersey as the preferred place for Kadhafi to stay during his US visit, instead of a Libyan diplomat's home in Manhattan, it said.

Although he had his Ukrainian nurse close at hand, Kadhafi did not bring his famed all-women guard unit with him to New York, and instead had only one female guard in a 350-member delegation, it said.

S.Korea wants China to back reunification via trade: leaks - 11/28

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

South Korea believes that the offer of commercial deals could help a reluctant China get on board the idea of Korean reunification, according to US diplomatic cables cited by the New York Times.

The cables, part of a trove divulged by WikiLeaks, showed contingency planning by US and South Korean diplomats should the isolated communist state of North Korea implode, according to an NYT report.

A February 2010 cable from the US ambassador in Seoul said South Korean officials believe that the right trade inducements would "help salve" China's "concerns about living with a reunified Korea" existing in a "benign alliance" with the United States, the report said.

The actual cable was not immediately accessible on the WikiLeaks database. The whistle-blower website has said it will publish thousands more documents over the coming days.

China sent hundreds of thousands of troops to fight for North Korea during the 1950-53 war after advancing US-led United Nations forces approached its Yalu border river with the North.

It is widely believed to be uneasy at the prospect of a unified Korea with strong ties to the United States, which currently has 28,500 troops stationed in the South.

China also fears that instability in the North could prompt a flood of refugees into its northeastern provinces.

South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak in August unveiled a multi-step blueprint for reunification, starting with a "peace community" after the peninsula is cleared of nuclear weapons.

The next step is to dramatically develop the North's economy and form an "economic community in which the two will work for economic integration", he said at the time, also proposing a unification tax in the South to finance the hefty cost.

US concerned over French ship for Russia: WikiLeaks – 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

The United States voiced concern to France earlier this year over the possible sale of a French warship to Russia, saying it sent a "mixed signal" to both Moscow and Eastern European allies, according to a leaked US document published Sunday.

In a meeting on February 8 in Paris, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and his French counterpart at the time, Herve Morin, disagreed over missile defense for Europe and over France's plans to sell the Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia, a secret diplomatic cable posted by the WikiLeaks website showed.

Gates, a former CIA director who closely followed the former Soviet Union, also offered a severe critique of Russia, saying democracy had "disappeared" there and that the government was essentially an oligarchy dominated by the security services.

In a meeting that touched on an array of issues, Gates "raised US concerns over the sale of a Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia as sending a mixed signal to both Russia and our Central and East European Allies," the cable said.

Morin disagreed, saying the warship would not alter Russia's overall military power.

"Morin told SecDef (secretary of defense) pointedly that he had pushed hard for the sale. He conceded that it was indeed a warship for power projection," the document said.

"But Morin asked rhetorically how we can tell Russia we desire partnership but then not trust them."

Morin expressed understanding of the US view that Central and East European states saw Russia as a potential threat, but argued "that this single ship would not make any difference with respect to Russian capabilities, as Russia's naval production ability was severely degraded."

Gates pointed to France's efforts in brokering a ceasefire in Georgia, saying that Moscow was not fully honoring the agreement and that the sale of the carrier would send the wrong message to Moscow as well as former Soviet satellites in Europe, it said.

The former CIA intelligence analyst also described Russia's government in blunt terms.

"SecDef observed that Russian democracy has disappeared and the government was an oligarchy run by the security services.

"President (Dmitry) Medvedev has a more pragmatic vision for Russia than PM (Vladimir) Putin, but there has been little real change," it said, referring to Gates' comments.

The cable recounted Morin questioning President Barack Obama's decision to set a date of July 2011 for the start of a withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, saying it could encourage Taliban insurgents to merely "wait it out," the document said.

Gates acknowledged that the target date had set off a "protracted" debate in Washington but said he "had come to the conclusion, however, that the Afghans needed to be put on notice that they would need to take responsibility for their own security," it said.

The account of the February meeting showed Morin strongly opposing US plans for a missile defense system in Europe tied to NATO allies. The alliance, however, approved the proposal at a summit in Lisbon a week ago.

Morin argued the US plan would "give publics a false sense of security," and said European countries lacked the funds to spend on missile defense weaponry, it said.

British PM faces 'embarrassing' leaked memo - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

Britain's Guardian newspaper Monday promised it would release leaked memos in which US officials offer "embarrassing" assessments of Prime Minister David Cameron and "weak" ex-leader Gordon Brown.

The paper began Sunday releasing a raft of documents sent by US embassies worldwide and will continue to do so daily over the next two weeks.

The documents relating to Brown and Cameron have not been released, but the newspaper said to expect damning verdicts on the coalition government and Brown.

WikiLeaks is releasing over 250,000 embassy cables, dating from 1966 to the end of February this year, in stages over the next few months.

Leaked US papers may cause red faces, says NZealand PM - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said Monday he expected some embarrassing fallout when US diplomatic cables from Wellington are released by whistleblower website WikiLeaks.

Key said he had been told almost 1500 documents from Washington's diplomatic mission in New Zealand were among the 250,000-plus cables being released by the website.

"We don't know all the details of them but there's bound to be one or two comments in there that might lead to embarrassment at the most, but nothing more serious than that," he told reporters.

Key declined to detail the content of the cables, saying they were not included in the initial release of documents from WikiLeaks and he would wait until they were made public.

"At a very high level, there's been a broad indication of one or two of them... nothing too serious," he said.

Key said he would not be too concerned if the documents contained candid comments.

"It's very important to understand that every embassy and every high commission around the world plays a role in gathering information as best they understand it and reporting back to the mother ship, if you like," he said.

"And there's always a bit of colour and artistic licence about that."

Asked if he knew how US diplomats -- who have given damning assessments of some world leaders in cables released so far -- had described him personally, Key replied: "Not in any detail, but I'm sure it would be glowing."

On the general issue of WikiLeaks releasing sensitive diplomatic material, Key said he "would be very concerned if it was to put lives at risk".

Israel could strike Iran without US help: leaked cable - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Dan De Luce

The United States has told France that Israel could strike Iran without US military support but the operation might not be successful, according to a leaked document published Sunday.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates gave his assessment at a meeting on February 8 in Paris with former French defense minister Herve Morin, according to a secret summary of the session that was posted on the WikiLeaks website, part of a massive document dump of classified cables.

Asked by Morin if Israel had the capability to strike Iran without US assistance, Gates "responded that he didn't know if they would be successful, but that Israel could carry out the operation," it said.

But Gates downplayed the value of any military operation against Iran, according to the document.

The American defense secretary told Morin that he "believed a conventional strike by any nation would only delay Iranian plans by one to three years, while unifying the Iranian people to be forever embittered against the attacker," it said.

Gates has made the same point in public remarks, underlining the potential risks of any military action against Iran over its nuclear program and arguing in favor of economic sanctions and diplomacy.

US diplomats asked to spy on foreign dignitaries: WikiLeaks - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Lachlan Carmichael

The United States has ordered its diplomats to play a larger intelligence role by performing espionage work like obtaining the credit card and frequent flyer numbers of foreign dignitaries, according to leaked US documents published Sunday.

Secret cables -- leaked by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks and published in newspapers including the New York Times and The Guardian in Britain -- reveal that US State Department personnel are asked to glean highly personal information from UN officials and key players from countries around the world.

The cables alluding to work usually associated with the Central Intelligence Agency and other spy bodies were sent to embassies in Africa, the Middle East, eastern Europe, Latin America and the US mission to the United Nations.

For example, a classified directive sent to US diplomats under US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's name in July last year sought technical details about the communications systems used by top UN officials, The Guardian said.

These included passwords and personal encryption keys used in private and commercial networks for official communications, it reported.

The New York Times said that one cable signed by Clinton sought "biographic and biometric information on ranking North Korean diplomats" from US diplomats at the US mission to the United Nations in New York.

The Guardian said the directive also sought intelligence on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's "management and decision-making style and his influence on the secretariat."

Washington also asked for credit card numbers, email addresses, phone, fax and pager numbers and even frequent-flyer account numbers for UN officials, the British daily added.

The secret "national human intelligence collection directive" was sent to US missions at the UN in New York, Vienna and Rome as well as 33 embassies and consulates.

A similar directive issued under Clinton's name in April 2009 sought out details about key figures in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, according to the Guardian.

The list asked for data "including health, opinions toward the US, training history, ethnicity... and language skills of key and emerging political, military, intelligence, opposition, ethnic, religious, and business leaders," said the cable on the Guardian website.

"Data should include email addresses, telephone and fax numbers, fingerprints, facial images, DNA, and iris scans," it said.

The directive also asked for reporting officers in the so-called African Great Lakes states to provide details on airfields, army camps and other military facilities as well as on military equipment.

The New York Times reported that one cable signed by Clinton sought from US diplomats at the US mission to the United Nations in New York "biographic and biometric information on ranking North Korean diplomats."

The New York Times also said that the State Department asked for "details about personal relations between Bulgarian leaders and Russian officials or businessmen," in a cable sent last year to the US embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The Guardian said a directive sent to Cairo, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Amman, Damascus and Riyadh demanded the travel plans and vehicles used by leading members of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

US embassy officials were instructed in another document to gather details about the military relations countries in central Africa have with China, Libya, North Korea, Iran and Russia, the British daily said.

The document stressed intelligence on the "transfer of strategic materials such as uranium," it said.

It also put a high priority on "details of arms acquisitions and arms sales by government or insurgents, including negotiations, contracts, deliveries, terms of sale, quantity and quality of equipment, and price and payment terms."

State Department spokesman Philip Crowley sought to shoot down the image of diplomats as spies.

"Contrary to some WikiLeaks' reporting, our diplomats are diplomats. They are not intelligence assets," he said on his Twitter feed.

"Diplomats collect information that shapes our policies and actions. Diplomats for all nations do the same thing," Crowley said in a later update to Twitter.

China directed Google hacking: leaked US documents - 11/28

Agence France Presse | Shaun Tandon

The United States believes that China's leadership has directed a hacking campaign into computers of Google and Western governments, according to US diplomatic files leaked Sunday.

The documents obtained by whistleblower site WikiLeaks revealed the intense and sometimes fraught diplomacy between the two Pacific powers on a range of issues -- particularly Iran and North Korea.

In one cable, the US embassy in Beijing said it learned from "a Chinese contact" that the country's Politburo had led years of hacking into computers of the United States, its allies and Tibet's spiritual leader the Dalai Lama.

The New York Times, which viewed the cable, said the embassy found that attacks against Google were "part of a coordinated campaign of computer sabotage carried out by government operatives, private security experts and Internet outlaws recruited by the Chinese government."

Google announced in March that it would no longer follow the communist government's instructions to filter searches for sensitive material after attacks against the company and Gmail accounts of Chinese dissidents.

Hacking campaigns originating from China have been reported before, but US officials have stopped short of publicly accusing Beijing of orchestrating cyber warfare.

The thousands of leaked documents also recounted efforts by the United States to persuade China to rein in North Korea.

In one secret memo on the WikiLeaks website, the United States in 2008 instructed its embassies to press China and Central Asian nations to block a North Korean plane suspected of proliferating weapons to Iran.

In another cable a year earlier reported by Britain's Guardian newspaper, the United States asked Beijing to stop what it believed to be a missile shipment from North Korea to Iran transiting through China.

Beijing is considered the only country with real influence in reclusive North Korea.

In a meeting late last year, senior Chinese official Wang Jiarui is quoted as reiterating Beijing's call for stability on the Korean peninsula and urging the United States to reach out to the North by promising not to seek regime change.

Despite the lack of movement on North Korea, the documents gave an upbeat US assessment on China's position on Iran.

A cable on the WikiLeaks website said Wang praised US policy on Iran in a meeting with Williams Burns, the State Department number three, and said Tehran should not seek nuclear weapons.

In another cable, a Chinese official dismissed concerns that Beijing's standing in the Islamic world was hurt by its response to 2009 ethnic bloodshed in the Xinjiang region, whose indigenous Uighur population is mostly Muslim.

An official was quoted as saying that China had stepped up media outreach in the Middle East to prevent any backlash, including setting up an Arabic-language version of state-run China Central Television.

The cables show China venting anger at the United States for refusing to hand over 22 Uighurs originally held at the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The United States cleared the men of wrongdoing but feared they would face persecution in China.

Cables depicted US officials searching the world asking countries to take Guantanamo inmates, with Slovenia's leadership told that a meeting with US President Barack Obama was linked to its decision on taking a prisoner.

According to another document, the US ambassador to Kyrgyzstan last year confronted her Chinese counterpart on information that Beijing offered three billion dollars if the neighboring country shut the Manas air base, a key US conduit for the war in Afghanistan.

The Chinese ambassador, Zhang Yannian, "ridiculed the notion of such a deal, he did not deny it outright," US Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller wrote.

"It would take three dollars from every Chinese person to pay for it," she quoted him as saying. "If our people found out, there'd be a revolution."

The United States eventually renewed US rights to the air base after the United States ramped up compensation.

Newspapers defend publishing WikiLeaks memos - 11/28

Agence France Presse | Chris Lefkow

The New York Times, The Guardian and Le Monde on Sunday defended their decision to publish hundreds of secret US diplomatic memos obtained by WikiLeaks while voluntarily withholding certain information.

The Times, in a note to readers, said it believes the documents "serve an important public interest, illuminating the goals, successes, compromises and frustrations of American diplomacy in a way that other accounts cannot match."

At the same time, the newspaper said it has "taken care to exclude, in its articles and in supplementary material, in print and online, information that would endanger confidential informants or compromise national security."

Both Britain's The Guardian and France's Le Monde said they had made voluntary redactions in the 250,000 diplomatic cables from US embassies around the world obtained by the whistleblower website.

Germany's Der Spiegel and Spain's El Pais also received the memos and Le Monde said that all five publications had worked together to edit out names whose public release could put persons in physical danger.

The Times said it had submitted the cables it planned to post to the US government and "invited them to challenge publication of any information that, in the official view, would harm the national interest."

The newspaper said it had "agreed to some, but not all" of the redactions suggested by US officials.

"The question of dealing with classified information is rarely easy, and never to be taken lightly," the Times said. "Editors try to balance the value of the material to public understanding against potential dangers to the national interest.

"For The Times to ignore this material would be to deny its own readers the careful reporting and thoughtful analysis they expect when this kind of information becomes public," it said.

"But the more important reason to publish these articles is that the cables tell the unvarnished story of how the government makes its biggest decisions, the decisions that cost the country most heavily in lives and money.

"As daunting as it is to publish such material over official objections, it would be presumptuous to conclude that Americans have no right to know what is being done in their name," the Times said.

The center-left Guardian argued that most of the US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks had already been posted on a US government intranet site with a "very wide" audience and were thus barely secret.

"These confidences were posted on a US government intranet... for a very wide distribution among diplomatic, government and military circles," the newspaper said.

"They may have been marked 'secret' but all secrets are relative: there are around three million Americans cleared to read material thus classified," it said.

"There are some cables the Guardian will not be releasing or reporting owing to the nature of sourcing or subject matter," the newspaper said, adding that "domestic libel laws impose a special burden on British publishers."

Le Monde said it believed its mission was to "examine the documents, subject them to journalistic analysis and make them available to our readers.

"To inform, however, does not rule out acting responsibly," Le Monde said. "Transparency and judgement are not incompatible -- and that is undoubtedly what distinguishes our strategy from that at the heart of WikiLeaks."

Yemeni president lies about US strikes: WikiLeaks - 11/28

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh admits lying to his own people by pretending that US military strikes against Al-Qaeda are carried out by Yemeni forces, according to a leaked US document.

"We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," Saleh said in January talks with General David Petraeus, then commander of US forces in the Middle East, according to a US diplomatic cable published by the whistleblower group WikiLeaks.

The cable was sent by the US ambassador to Yemen, Stephen Seche, according to the WikiLeaks website.

The cable said Saleh made the remarks when he welcomed a Petraeus proposal to move away from using cruise missiles to hit militants and instead use aircraft dropping precision-guided bombs from outside Yemeni territory.

Saleh saw cruise missiles as less accurate, it said.

It said Saleh's remarks prompted Yemen's deputy prime minister Alimi to joke that he had just "lied" by telling parliament that Yemeni forces had staged strikes against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Qaeda's Yemeni arm.

During a meeting about Al-Qaeda with John Brennan, the US deputy national security adviser, Saleh was "dismissive, bored and impatient," according to another leaked US diplomatic cable published in Britain's The Guardian.

With more than 100,000 US troops fighting Al-Qaeda's allies in Afghanistan and public skepticism in Yemen over the US military's role there, US officials have stressed that Sanaa will lead the fight against Islamist militants.

On November 16, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said providing equipment and training to Yemeni security forces offered the best way to counter the threat posed by Al-Qaeda militants.

Leaked wires show undiplomatic US take on leaders – 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

Diplomats are by definition known for the niceties of their public statements, but leaked documents out Sunday show that US officials can be merciless in their assessments behind closed doors.

The thousands of secret cables released by the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks feature unflattering descriptions of the leaders of both US allies and adversaries.

Here are some of the more colorful descriptions, as found in the leaked documents or reported by The Guardian, The New York Times or Der Spiegel:

-- ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER SILVIO BERLUSCONI. A senior US diplomat described him as "feckless, vain, and ineffective as a modern European leader." Another cable called him "physically and politically weak" and said he did not rest properly because of his late-night partying.

-- AFGHAN PRESIDENT HAMID KARZAI. A cable described Karzai as "extremely weak" and prone to being persuaded by conspiracy theories. Karzai has had a rocky relationship with US President Barack Obama.

-- LIBYAN LEADER MOAMER KADHAFI. A cable says Kadhafi is "almost obsessively dependent on a small core of trusted personnel" and reportedly cannot travel without a particular "voluptuous" Ukrainian nurse. Kadhafi is said to suffer from fears of flying over water and staying on upper floors of buildings.

-- RUSSIAN PRESIDENT DMITRY MEDVEDEV. Despite officially being the head of state and above Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, the US embassy in Moscow says Medvedev "plays Robin to Putin's Batman."

-- GERMAN CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL. A document called her "risk averse and rarely creative." Her vice chancellor and foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, is said to have an "exuberant personality" but little foreign policy know-how.

-- FRENCH PRESIDENT NICOLAS SARKOZY. The US embassy called him "thin-skinned and authoritarian," pointing to his rebukes of his team.

-- YEMENI PRESIDENT ALI ABDULLAH SALEH. A cable said he came off as "dismissive, bored and impatient" during a meeting with John Brennan, Obama's counter-terrorism aide. Yemen is emerging as a front line in US efforts against Islamic extremists.

-- ZIMBABWE'S PRESIDENT ROBERT MUGABE. "To give the devil his due, he is a brilliant tactician (sic)," outgoing US ambassador Christopher Dell wrote in 2007, saying Mugabe has survived because he is "more clever and more ruthless than any other politician in Zimbabwe."

Europe, Israel, Arabs urge action on Iran: WikiLeaks- 11/28

Agence France Presse / Dave Clark

The vast trove of diplomatic cables leaked on Sunday by the WikiLeaks website shows that US allies in Europe and the Middle East are pushing for tough action against the Iranian nuclear threat.

The international community is already pressuring Iran to drop its attempt to refine uranium, but the leaked cables published Sunday by world newspapers show that behind the scenes world leaders are fearful and pessimistic.

From the first memos released, it was learned that:

-- Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz has "repeatedly" urged his US allies to take military action against Tehran's nuclear programme and urged them to "cut off the head of the snake".

-- Israel believes US President Barack Obama's diplomatic outreach to Iran is doomed to failure and that time is running out before military action will need to be tabled if Tehran is not to get a nuclear bomb.

-- French President Nicolas Sarkozy's top diplomatic adviser told senior US officials: "The current Iranian regime is effectively a fascist state and the time has come to decide on next steps."

Tehran insists that its nuclear programme is peaceful, and has relied on Russia and China -- which depends on Iranian oil shipments -- to slow the tempo of diplomatic progress towards tougher sanctions.

But international concern is building. Traditional foes such as Israel and the Arab states share the West's concerns about Tehran, and Russia has begun to harden its stance against its former ally.

~~A leaked document from November 2009 on Tehran's alleged plans to "stabilize"~~ US military officials, quotes Israeli defence

During the meeting, an agent of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence service said Iran was playing for time to "avoid sanctions while pursuing its strategic objective to obtain a military nuclear capability.

"From Mossad's perspective, there is no reason to believe Iran will do anything but use negotiations to stall for time so that by 2010-2011, Iran will have the technological capability to build a nuclear weapon," he said.

And in June 2009, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak warned US lawmakers the West had only until the end of 2010 to find a way to halt the Iranian nuclear programme or face a Middle East arms race.

"Barak estimated a window between six and 18 months from now in which stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons might still be viable," he said, according to one of the leaked cables on the website of the Guardian.

"After that, he said, any military solution would result in unacceptable collateral damage."

According to another leaked US cable, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah made an even blunter plea during an April 2008 meeting with US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and US General David Petraeus.

"He told you to 'cut off the head of the snake'," Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, Adel al-Jubeir, told the US embassy in Riyadh.

"The King, Foreign Minister, (intelligence chief) Prince Muqrin, and Prince Nayif all agreed that the Kingdom needs to cooperate with the US on resisting and rolling back Iranian influence and subversion in Iraq," the memo said.

"The King was particularly adamant on this point, and it was echoed by the senior princes as well. Al-Jubeir recalled the King's frequent exhortations to the US to attack Iran and so put an end to its nuclear weapons program."

Meanwhile, Sarkozy's diplomatic adviser Jean-David Levitte warned that Iran's response to US President Barack Obama's bid to engage it on dialogue over the future of its alleged nuclear weapons ambitions was a "farce".

"The current Iranian regime is effectively a fascist state and the time has come to decide on next steps," Levitte warned, according to an account of his meeting with US Secretary of State Philip Gordon on September 16, 2009.

Levitte also expressed concern that Israel might take unilateral military action to hit Iranian nuclear facilities, and reported that he had warned China that such a strike would trigger a global fuel crisis.

Adding to the concern, the leaks also show US intelligence believes Iran has obtained advanced missiles from North Korea capable of striking Europe as far as Berlin, according to documents cited by the New York Times.

Reacting to the leaks, a Saudi government advisor who asked not to be identified told AFP: "The whole thing is very negative. It's not good for confidence-building."

Riyadh had been warned by Washington that documents would be leaked, but they had not known in advance exactly what would come out, he added.

Official Saudi government spokesmen were not immediately available.

Berlusconi laughs off criticism in leaked US documents - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi laughed off criticism of his playboy lifestyle in diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks Sunday, but an opposition party said it further discredited Italy.

Berlusconi had "had a good laugh" at a damning assessment of his "ineffective" leadership, his partying lifestyle and his close links with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, sources told Italy's ANSA news agency.

Britain's newspaper The Guardian had reported that Elizabeth Dibble, US charge d'affaires in Rome, described Berlusconi to be "feckless, vain, and ineffective as a modern European leader."

Another document from Rome reported that Berlusconi was a "physically and politically weak" leader whose "frequent late nights and penchant for partying hard mean he does not get sufficient rest," the paper reported.

And The New York Times said US diplomats in Rome expressed concern at Berlusconi's unusually close ties with Putin.

The reports mentioned lavish gifts, lucrative energy contracts and a "shadowy" Russian-speaking Italian intermediary, the paper reported.

The opposition Democratic Party said the latest revelations "confirm the level of discredit that Berlusconi has brought to Italy's image in the world."

US suspected China pressing Kyrgyzstan: leaked files - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

The United States confronted China on information it tried to pressure Kyrgyzstan to pull the rug from a US base, possibly due to a dispute over Guantanamo detainees, a leaked document said Sunday.

In a confidential cable last year, released by WikiLeaks, a US diplomat quoted Kyrgyz officials saying that China had offered three billion dollars to close Manas air base, a key US conduit for the war in Afghanistan.

US Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller said she asked her Chinese counterpart, Zhang Yannian, about the allegations and that he became so flustered he briefly lost his ability to converse in Russian.

Zhang "ridiculed the notion of such a deal, he did not deny it outright," she wrote.

"It would take three dollars from every Chinese person' to pay for it," she quoted him as saying. "If our people found out, there'd be a revolution."

Zhang said that China had only commercial interests in Kyrgyzstan but "complained bitterly" about inmates from China's Uighur minority being held at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay.

The United States cleared 22 Uighur detainees of wrongdoing but refused to hand them over to China, fearing they would face persecution.

Other cables depicted US officials searching the world asking countries to take former Guantanamo inmates, with Slovenia's leadership told that a meeting with President Barack Obama was linked to its decision on taking a prisoner.

Kyrgyzstan's former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who was ousted in a coup in April, vowed to close the base last year before allowing it to stay open after receiving a significant increase in rent from Washington.

Gfoeller said the Chinese ambassador agreed that a two-billion-dollar package offered to Kyrgyzstan by Russia was tied to closing down Manas, saying that the Russian ambassador was recently in "an expansive mood."

WikiLeaks evades cyber attack to publish US cables – 11/28

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

WikiLeaks evaded a massive cyber attack Sunday to begin posting hundreds of thousands of classified US diplomatic documents, the whistleblower organization said.

Hours before the planned release of the US embassy cables, WikiLeaks said on its Twitter feed that it was under "under a mass distributed denial of service attack."

From around 1700 GMT its main website <http://WikiLeaks.org> was inaccessible due to the attack.

But after creating a sub-website -- <http://cablegate.WikiLeaks.org> -- the whistleblower group went ahead with the publishing of the documents after US, British, Spanish, French and German newspapers also followed through with their own account of the leak.

"Tomorrow we will provide information on how other media groups can apply to for embargo access to #cablegate info," WikiLeaks said later in a statement on its Twitter feed.

The main WikiLeaks website was still apparently under a distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attack late Sunday and was not immediately accessible.

Classic DDoS attacks occur when legions of "zombie" computers, normally machines infected with viruses, are commanded to simultaneously visit a website. Such a massive onslaught of demand can overwhelm servers, slowing service or knocking it offline completely.

It was unclear late Sunday from where the DDoS attack on WikiLeaks had originated, at a time when it was about to publish the trove, which has faced stiff opposition from all parts of the US diplomatic and military apparatus.

WikiLeaks said on its "cablegate" website the 251,287 documents -- including 15,652 cables classified as secret -- date from 1966 to February this year and contain "confidential communications between 274 embassies in countries throughout the world and the State Department in Washington DC."

WikiLeaks said by Sunday evening it had released 219 documents online.

WikiLeaks: US probed Al-Qaeda presence in Paraguay - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

Washington ordered its diplomats in 2008 to probe a possible Al-Qaeda presence in a border zone between Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, according to a confidential cable released Sunday by WikiLeaks.

The State Department cable on "reporting and collection needs" was sent to the US embassy in Asuncion.

It revealed a US concern about the possibility of Al-Qaeda and other terror networks operating in the Paraguay-Argentina-Brazil border zone, which has a history of immigration from Arab countries.

The cable requested intelligence on terror groups and supporters including Al-Qaeda and other Islamist militant groups such as Egypt's Jamaa Islamiya; Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip; and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Washington requested any evidence of the terror groups raising cash through human smuggling, drug running and other criminal activities, and any details of training networks and ties with other groups.

The US State Department also wanted to know if Paraguay's government supported its declared "war on terror".

It asked Asuncion diplomats to report on Paraguay's plans to confront any terror threat, "including support for or opposition to the United States in the war against terrorism; Paraguay's position in regional and international fora, including support for or objection to US counterterrorism policies".

WikiLeaks published more 250,000 confidential cables, releasing them to the Spanish daily El Pais, Britain's The Guardian, The New York Times, France's Le Monde and the German magazine Der Spiegel.

The cable on Paraguay was published by The Guardian and made available on its Internet site.

US fumes over WikiLeaks release of diplomat memos - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

The WikiLeaks release of more than 250,000 diplomatic cables on Sunday has infuriated Washington, where officials said it could put lives in danger and threaten national security.

At least one US lawmaker called for the prosecution of the founder of the whistle-blower website, which had previously released nearly a half million classified military reports on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The White House called Sunday's release a "reckless and dangerous action" in a statement released after the first batch of cables was published by The New York Times and European newspapers.

"To be clear -- such disclosures put at risk our diplomats, intelligence professionals, and people around the world who come to the United States for assistance in promoting democracy and open government," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said.

Democratic Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, called the release a "reckless action which jeopardizes lives" and rejected Assange's claims to be acting in the public interest.

"This is not an academic exercise about freedom of information and it is not akin to the release of the Pentagon Papers, which involved an analysis aimed at saving American lives and exposing government deception," he added, referring to a secret history of the Vietnam War leaked in 1971.

US Republican congressman Peter King, the ranking member of the House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee, urged the attorney general to prosecute WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for espionage.

The latest release "manifests Mr Assange's purposeful intent to damage not only our national interests in fighting the war on terror, but also undermines the very safety of coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan."

He went on to urge the State Department to designate WikiLeaks a "Foreign Terrorist Organization," saying it "posed a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States," in a statement from his office.

A Justice Department spokeswoman declined to comment on whether the United States was mulling criminal charges against Assange, saying only that it was assisting the Pentagon in its "ongoing investigation" into the disclosure.

The top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee said the release was "an embarrassment to the (Barack) Obama administration and represents a critical failure by the Pentagon and intelligence community."

Representative Pete Hoekstra called on the intelligence community to "move quickly to assess the failures in this case" and said Congress should also take up the matter.

The Pentagon, which also strongly condemned the release, said it had taken new steps to "prevent further compromise of sensitive data."

The steps were taken after Pentagon reviews launched in August that followed the disclosure of tens of thousands of US military intelligence files on the war in Afghanistan.

The measures included disabling all write-capability for flash drives or removable media on classified computers, restricting transfers of information from classified to unclassified systems and better monitoring of suspicious computer activity using similar tactics employed by credit card companies.

"Bottom line: It is now much more difficult for a determined actor to get access to and move information outside of authorized channels," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said.

US worry about Turkish PM's dependability: WikiLeaks - 11/28

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks to German news magazine Der Spiegel show US diplomats have doubts about Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's dependability as a partner.

American diplomats distrust Erdogan and his unrealistic views on the world, wrote Der Spiegel. He gets his information almost exclusively from newspapers with links to the Islamists, and allegedly has little time for the analyses of his ministries, the diplomats believe.

The prime minister, one of the United States' most important NATO partners, has surrounded himself with "an iron ring of sycophantic (but contemptuous) advisors," writes a diplomat.

Despite his bragging, he is afraid of losing power, according to the dispatches viewed by Der Spiegel. One source is quoted as telling the Americans: "Tayyip believes in God but doesn't trust Him".

Erdogan's advisors, and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, are portrayed as having little understanding of politics beyond Turkey.

A high-ranking government adviser, quoted by US diplomats, describes Davutoglu as "exceptionally dangerous" and warns that he would use his Islamist influence on Erdogan.

A cable signed by the US ambassador in January 2010 says the foreign minister wants to reassert on the Balkans the influence the Ottoman empire used to exert on the region.

But the foreign minister overestimates himself and Turkey, wrote the US diplomats. Turkey, sums up a cable translated into German by the magazine, "has the ambitions of Rolls Royce but the means of Rover".

Cable leaks 'irresponsible,' threaten security: Canada - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

Canada said Sunday that WikiLeaks' release of thousands of US diplomatic cables was 'irresponsible' and could threaten national security.

"Irresponsible leaks like these are deplorable and do not serve anybody's national interests. The perpetrators of these leaks may threaten our national security," said Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon, on the heels of a huge roll-out of sensitive US documents by the whistleblower website.

CBC television said that an estimated 2,500 cables released on Sunday are from US officials in Ottawa and in consular offices throughout Canada. The content of those cables was not immediately known.

Canadian media speculated that the leaked documents could contain embarrassing revelations about Canada's decision to end its combat mission in Afghanistan next year.

Other observers said the documents may concern Canadian citizen Omar Khadr, who was arrested in Afghanistan at the age of 15 after killing a US soldier and held for several years at the Guantanamo Bay prison facility.

Canada said earlier this month it had agreed to repatriate Khadr, whose lawyers signed a plea deal that would see him serve eight years.

Khadr, now 24, may be able to contest the sentence once he is back in Canada, where his case has sparked controversy.

Opposition parties and rights groups have criticized Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government for not defending his rights as a Canadian and not recognizing him as a child soldier.

US envoy sees Berlusconi as 'ineffective': leaked report - 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

The top US diplomat in Rome found Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to be an "ineffective" leader who wastes his energy on parties, according to US documents leaked by WikiLeaks.

Britain's newspaper The Guardian reported that Elizabeth Dibble, US charge d'affaires in Rome, considered Berlusconi to be "feckless, vain, and ineffective as a modern European leader."

Another document from Rome reported that Berlusconi was a "physically and politically weak" leader whose "frequent late nights and penchant for partying hard mean he does not get sufficient rest," according to The Guardian.

Meanwhile, The New York Times said US diplomats in Rome reported last year that their Italian contacts believed that Berlusconi enjoys unusually close ties with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The diplomats mentioned lavish gifts, lucrative energy contracts and a "shadowy" Russian-speaking Italian intermediary, according to The New York Times.

Berlusconi "appears increasingly to be the mouthpiece of Putin" in Europe, the diplomats reportedly wrote.

WikiLeaks: Sarkozy aide branded Venezuela's Chavez 'crazy' – 11/28

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

French President Nicolas Sarkozy's senior diplomatic advisor branded Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez "crazy" in talks with top US officials, according to a diplomatic cable leaked Sunday.

Jean-David Levitte made the comment in talks on September 16, 2009 with US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon, according to a copy of a US memo published on the website of the British daily the Guardian.

"Levitte observed that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is 'crazy' and said that even Brazil wasn't able to support him anymore," said the US memo, part of a vast trove of diplomatic traffic released by the WikiLeaks website.

"Unfortunately, Chavez is taking one of the richest countries in Latin America and turning it into another Zimbabwe," Levitte said, according to the US account of the meeting.

US asked China to stop N.Korea-Iran trade: leaked documents – 11/28

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

Washington demanded China block shipments of missile parts from North Korea to Iran, according to US documents leaked by WikiLeaks and cited by the Guardian on Sunday.

The British newspaper, citing a diplomatic cable from 2007, said the United States gave China specific details about a shipment that was expected to transit Beijing.

"We... insist on a substantive response from China to this information," said the document published on the Guardian website, marked "secret" and sent by the State Department.

According to the cable, diplomats were instructed to make the request "at the most effective level possible", and express wider concerns "at the highest level possible".

"The US believes that the proliferation of missile technology between North Korea and Iran will increase and that these two countries will attempt to conduct these transfers through Chinese territory," the document read.

It listed 11 alleged deliveries of missile-related jet vanes from North Korea to Iran, saying: "It appears that these shipments did occur and are continuing to transit via Beijing."

The document pointed out that then US president George W. Bush had raised the issue directly with Chinese President Hu Jintao.

It was not known whether the demand led to action by Beijing, said the Guardian, which was given advance access to the WikiLeaks documents.

The disclosure comes at a time of high tension on the Korean peninsula following North Korea's artillery strike on the South last week.

China is Pyongyang's sole major ally and has come under increasing international pressure to act in response to the shelling, which killed four people, but has refrained from condemning the North.

Israel warned US engagement with Iran pointless: WikiLeaks

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

Israel has warned its US ally that President Barack Obama's attempt to engage diplomatically with Iran over its nuclear weapons programme will fail, according to leaked memos published Sunday.

Several US cables released among a trove of secret documents secured by the WikiLeaks whistleblower site and released to newspapers, show Israel pushing for Washington to consider launching military strikes against Iran.

One memo from November 2009 recounting a meeting between senior Israeli and US military officials, quotes Israeli defence ministry political and military director Amos Gilad describing Tehran's alleged plans as "intolerable".

"He said Iran remains determined to reach the 'nuclear option'," said the memo, which was tagged "secret" and described as an account of a meeting of the US-Israeli "40th Joint Political Military Group".

The documents were part of a trove released Sunday by the WikiLeaks website, and published in full or in part by several international dailies, including Britain's Guardian, which has the Israeli memos in full.

During the meeting, an agent of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence service said Iran was playing for time to "avoid sanctions while pursuing its strategic objective to obtain a military nuclear capability.

"From Mossad's perspective, there is no reason to believe Iran will do anything but use negotiations to stall for time so that by 2010-2011, Iran will have the technological capability to build a nuclear weapon," he said.

And in a separate meeting in June 2009, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak told visiting US lawmakers the West had only until the end of 2010 to find a way to halt the Iranian nuclear programme or face a Middle East arms race.

"Barak estimated a window between six and 18 months from now in which stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons might still be viable," he said, according to the leaked US cable.

"After that, he said, any military solution would result in unacceptable collateral damage," the memo said.

"He also expressed concern that should Iran develop nuclear capabilities, other rogue states and/or terrorist groups would not be far behind."

Iran obtained missiles from North Korea: leaked US documents – 11/28

Agence France Presse / Unattributed

US intelligence believes Iran has obtained advanced missiles from North Korea capable of striking Europe, according to US documents leaked by WikiLeaks and cited by the New York Times on Sunday.

The newspaper, in a diplomatic cable dated February 24, said "secret American intelligence assessments have concluded that Iran has obtained a cache of advanced missiles, based on a Russian design."

Iran obtained 19 of the North Korean missiles, an improved version of Russia's R-27, from North Korea, the cable said, and was "taking pains to master the technology in an attempt to build a new generation of missiles."

At the request of US President Barack Obama's administration, the New York Times said it had agreed not to publish the text of that cable.

"The North Korean version of the advanced missile, known as the BM-25, could carry a nuclear warhead," said the newspaper, adding it had a range of up to 2,000 miles (more than 3,000 kilometres).

"If fired from Iran, that range, in theory, would let its warheads reach targets as far away as Western Europe, including Berlin. If fired northwestward, the warheads could reach Moscow," it said, referring to other dispatches.

"The cables say that Iran not only obtained the BM-25, but also saw the advanced technology as a way to learn how to design and build a new class of more powerful engines," said the Times.

Merkel slammed by US as 'risk averse': WikiLeaks

Agence France Presse | Unattributed

Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks to German news magazine Der Spiegel include embarrassingly frank US assessments of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is described as a weak leader.

In a message attributed to a US diplomat in Berlin dated March 24, 2009, the State Department is told that Merkel is "risk averse and rarely creative", Der Spiegel reported on Sunday.

"The Americans argue that the chancellor views international diplomacy above all from the perspective of how she can profit from it domestically," the magazine wrote.

Merkel's vice-chancellor and foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, comes in for harsher criticism in the secret documents and is described as incompetent, vain and critical of America, Der Spiegel said.

An embassy cable from Berlin from September 22, 2009, days before the general election that put him in office, describes Westerwelle as having an "exuberant personality" but little foreign policy experience.

"That is why he finds it difficult to take a backseat when it comes to any matters of dispute with Chancellor Angela Merkel," the cable quoted by Der Spiegel says.

Meanwhile Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, Germany's most popular politician, is quoted as telling the US ambassador to Germany, Philip Murphy, in February 2010 that Westerwelle was the real barrier to a US request for an increase in the number of German troops in Afghanistan.

Zu Guttenberg also disparages his boss, saying that Merkel has trouble implementing her own economic policies.

And Horst Seehofer, the head of the Christian Social Union, the Bavarian sister party to Merkel's Christian Democrats, is shown as unaware that half of 40,000 US troops in Germany are based in his state, which he also governs.

The State Department documents show Washington was kept abreast of coalition negotiations by an informant while Merkel was forming her current government in October 2009.

A German diplomatic source said that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had called Westerwelle on Friday to "express her regret about the impending publication of internal US documents".

US scrambles to contain diplomatic damage from leaked State Department cables - 11/29

Associated Press | Matthew Lee

WASHINGTON (AP) - The release of more than 250,000 classified State Department documents forced the Obama administration into damage control, trying to contain fallout from unflattering assessments of world leaders and revelations about backstage U.S. diplomacy.

The publication of the secret cables on Sunday amplified widespread global alarm about Iran's nuclear ambitions and unveiled occasional U.S. pressure tactics aimed at hot spots in Afghanistan, Pakistan and North Korea. The leaks also disclosed bluntly candid impressions from both diplomats and other world leaders about America's allies and foes.

In the wake of the massive document dump by online whistleblower WikiLeaks and numerous media reports detailing their contents, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was expected to address the diplomatic repercussions on Monday. Clinton could deal with the impact first hand after she leaves Washington on a four-nation tour of Central Asia and the Middle East -- a region that figures prominently in the leaked documents.

The cables unearthed new revelations about long-simmering nuclear trouble spots, detailing U.S., Israeli and Arab world fears of Iran's growing nuclear program, American concerns about Pakistan's atomic arsenal and U.S. discussions about a united Korean peninsula as a long-term solution to North Korean aggression.

None of the disclosures appeared particularly explosive, but their publication could become problems for the officials concerned and for any secret initiatives they had preferred to keep quiet. The massive release of material intended for diplomatic eyes only is sure to ruffle feathers in foreign capitals, a certainty that already prompted U.S. diplomats to scramble in recent days to shore up relations with key allies in advance of the leaks.

At Clinton's first stop in Astana, Kazakhstan, she will be attending a summit of officials from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a diplomatic grouping that includes many officials from countries cited in the leaked cables.

The documents published by The New York Times, France's Le Monde, Britain's Guardian newspaper, German magazine Der Spiegel and others laid out the behind-the-scenes conduct of Washington's international relations, shrouded in public by platitudes, smiles and handshakes at photo sessions among senior officials.

The White House immediately condemned the release of the WikiLeaks documents, saying "such disclosures put at risk our diplomats, intelligence professionals and people around the world who come to the United States for assistance in promoting democracy and open government."

U.S. officials may also have to mend fences after revelations that they gathered personal information on other diplomats. The leaks cited American memos encouraging U.S. diplomats at the United Nations to collect detailed data about the U.N. secretary general, his team and foreign diplomats -- going beyond what is considered the normal run of information-gathering expected in diplomatic circles.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley played down the diplomatic spying allegations. "Our diplomats are just that, diplomats," he said. "They collect information that shapes our policies and actions. This is what diplomats, from our country and other countries, have done for hundreds of years."

The White House noted that "by its very nature, field reporting to Washington is candid and often incomplete information. It is not an expression of policy, nor does it always shape final policy decisions."

"Nevertheless, these cables could compromise private discussions with foreign governments and opposition leaders, and when the substance of private conversations is printed on the front pages of newspapers across the world, it can deeply impact not only U.S. foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends around the world," the White House said.

On its website, The New York Times said "the documents serve an important public interest, illuminating the goals, successes, compromises and frustrations of American diplomacy in a way that other accounts cannot match."

Le Monde said it "considered that it was part of its mission to learn about these documents, to make a journalistic analysis and to make them available to its readers." Der Spiegel said that in publishing the documents its reporters and editors "weighed the public interest against the justified interest of countries in security and confidentiality."

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange claimed the administration was trying to cover up alleged evidence of serious "human rights abuse and other criminal behavior" by the U.S. government. WikiLeaks posted the documents just hours after it claimed its website had been hit by a cyberattack that made the site inaccessible for much of the day.

But extracts of the more than 250,000 cables posted online by news outlets that had been given advance copies of the documents showed deep U.S. concerns about Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs along with fears about regime collapse in Pyongyang.

The Guardian said some cables showed King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia repeatedly urging the United States to attack Iran to destroy its nuclear program. The newspaper also said officials in Jordan and Bahrain have openly called for Iran's nuclear program to be stopped by any means and that leaders of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt referred to Iran "as 'evil,' an 'existential threat' and a power that 'is going to take us to war,'" The Guardian said.

Those documents may prove the trickiest because even though the concerns of the Gulf Arab states are known, their leaders rarely offer such stark appraisals in public.

The Times highlighted documents that indicated the U.S. and South Korea were "gaming out an eventual collapse of North Korea" and discussing the prospects for a unified country if the isolated, communist North's economic troubles and political transition lead it to implode.

The Times also cited diplomatic cables describing unsuccessful U.S. efforts to prod Pakistani officials to remove highly enriched uranium from a reactor out of fear that the material could be used to make an illicit atomic device. And the newspaper cited cables that showed Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, telling Gen. David Petraeus that his country would pretend that American missile strikes against a local al-Qaida group had come from Yemen's forces.

The paper also cited documents showing the U.S. used hardline tactics to win approval from countries to accept freed detainees from Guantanamo Bay. It said Slovenia was told to take a prisoner if its president wanted to meet with President Barack Obama and said the Pacific island of Kiribati was offered millions of dollars to take in a group of detainees.

It also cited a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing that included allegations from a Chinese contact that China's Politburo directed a cyber intrusion into Google's computer systems as part of a "coordinated campaign of computer sabotage carried out by government operatives, private security experts and Internet outlaws."

Le Monde said another memo asked U.S. diplomats to collect basic contact information about U.N. officials that included Internet passwords, credit card numbers and frequent flyer numbers. They were asked to obtain fingerprints, ID photos, DNA and iris scans of people of interest to the United States, Le Monde said.

The Times said another batch of documents raised questions about Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and his relationship with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. One cable said Berlusconi "appears increasingly to be the mouthpiece of Putin" in Europe, the Times reported.

Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini on Sunday called the release the "Sept. 11 of world diplomacy," in that everything that had once been accepted as normal has now changed.

Der Spiegel reported that the cables portrayed German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle in unflattering terms. It said American diplomats saw Merkel as risk-averse and Westerwelle as largely powerless.

Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, meanwhile, was described as erratic and in the near constant company of a Ukrainian nurse who was described in one cable as "a voluptuous blonde," according to the Times.

WikiLeaks' action was widely condemned.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said it was an "irresponsible disclosure of sensitive official documents" while Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, called the document release "unhelpful and untimely."

In Australia, Assange's home country, Attorney General Robert McClelland said law enforcement officials were investigating whether WikiLeaks broke any laws.

The State Department's top lawyer warned Assange late Saturday that lives and military operations would be put at risk if the cables were released. Legal adviser Harold Koh said WikiLeaks would be breaking the law if it went ahead. He also rejected a request from Assange to cooperate in removing sensitive details from the documents.

Pakistan criticizes release of classified US cables as 'irresponsible' - 11/29

Associated Press / Sebastian Abbot

ISLAMABAD (AP) - Pakistan on Monday criticized the release of classified U.S. diplomatic cables that reportedly raise concerns that highly enriched uranium could be diverted from its nuclear program to build an illicit weapon.

U.S. officials have long expressed concern that Islamic extremists in Pakistan could target the country's nuclear program in an attempt to steal a weapon or, more likely, the materials needed to build one.

Pakistan has always said it is confident its nuclear security is good enough to prevent this from happening -- a stance supported publicly by the U.S. But classified cables released by online whistle-blower Wikileaks reportedly reveal the U.S. has doubts and has clashed with Pakistan over the issue.

"We condemn the irresponsible disclosure of sensitive official documents," said Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Abdul Basit.

U.S. Ambassador Cameron Munter also criticized the release in an editorial in *The News*, a Pakistani English-language newspaper.

"I cannot vouch for the authenticity of any one of these documents," said Munter. "But I can say that the United States deeply regrets the disclosure of any information that was intended to be confidential. And we condemn it."

Details from the roughly quarter million confidential cables were published Sunday by *The New York Times*, France's *Le Monde*, Britain's *Guardian* newspaper, German magazine *Der Spiegel* and other media outlets that received them in advance from Wikileaks.

According to the cables, the U.S. has mounted an unsuccessful secret effort since 2007 to remove from a Pakistani reactor highly enriched uranium that American officials fear could be diverted for use in an illicit nuclear device, *The New York Times* reported.

Former U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson reported in May 2009 that Pakistan refused to schedule a visit by American technical experts, according to the newspaper, because, as a Pakistani official said, "if the local media got word of the fuel removal, 'they certainly would portray it as the United States taking Pakistan's nuclear weapons,' he argued."

Rumors that the U.S. is intent on seizing Pakistan's nuclear arsenal have contributed to strong anti-American sentiment in the country despite frequent denials by U.S. officials.

Basit, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, did not comment directly on the details of the cables that were leaked. He said the U.S. warned Pakistan in advance about the release and officials were still examining the relevant documents.

Wikileaks released over 200 of the confidential cables on its website Sunday, but none of them appeared to contain information about the Pakistani nuclear program. Wikileaks said it plans to release the rest of the cables over the next few months.

The documents could prove embarrassing for other countries allied with Pakistan as well.

The king of Saudi Arabia reportedly called Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari the greatest obstacle to the country's progress, *The New York Times* said.

"When the head is rotten, it affects the whole body," the newspaper quoted King Abdullah as saying.

Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar dismissed the reported comment, saying "President Zardari regards Saudi King Abdullah as his elder brother."

"The so-called leaks are no more than an attempt to create misperceptions between two important Muslim countries," he said.

British paper defends publishing WikiLeaks memos - 11/28

Associated Press / Not attributed

British newspaper the Guardian on Sunday defended its decision to publish hundreds of secret US memos released by whistleblowing website WikiLeaks.

In an editorial, the centre-left newspaper argued that most of the US diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks had already been posted on a US government intranet site with a "very wide" audience and were thus barely secret.

"These confidences were posted on a US government intranet... for a very wide distribution among diplomatic, government and military circles," the newspaper argued.

"They may have been marked 'secret' but all secrets are relative: there are around 3 million Americans cleared to read material thus classified," the paper stated.

In the same paper, the columnist Simon Jenkins, a former editor of The Times of London, argued that the Guardian and other papers such as The New York Times and Le Monde which also published the memos, had acted responsibly in their handling of the material.

The papers had informed the US State Department of the areas covered by the leaks and invited "representations" from them, agreeing to 'redact' some of the material where necessary.

The papers, of course, "could not be party to putting the lives of individuals or sources at risk", Jenkins said.

But: "The job of the media is not to protect power from embarrassment," he argued.

Earlier, the British government had condemned the release of the documents.

"We condemn any unauthorised release of this classified information, just as we condemn leaks of classified material in the UK," a Foreign Office statement said.

"They can damage national security, are not in the national interest and, as the US have said, may put lives at risk. We have a very strong relationship with the US government. That will continue."

Australian police investigate whether WikiLeaks' Australian founder Assange can be charged

Associated Press / Not attributed

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) - Attorney-General Robert McClelland says police are investigating whether any Australian law has been broken by the latest leaking of confidential documents by online whistle-blower WikiLeaks.

McClelland told reporters on Monday he was not aware of a request from the United States to cancel WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's Australian passport. He says a range of options are under consideration by Australian government agencies in response to the latest disclosure of classified U.S. material.

McClelland says there are "potentially a number of criminal laws" that could have been breached.

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard last week condemned the planned leaks as reckless and potentially harmful to national security interests.

WikiLeaks blames earlier site outage on denial-of-service attack by unknown hackers – 11/28
Associated Press / Not attributed

The online website WikiLeaks on Sunday blamed the temporary outage of its site on a denial-of-service attack by unknown hackers trying to prevent its release of hundreds of thousands of classified U.S. State Department documents.

WikiLeaks said on Twitter early Sunday that its website was "under a mass distributed denial of service attack" but promised that Spain's El Pais, France's Le Monde, Germany's Der Spiegel, Britain's Guardian newspaper and The New York Times "will publish many US embassy cables tonight, even if WikiLeaks goes down." WikiLeaks had given the media outlets prior access to the diplomatic cables to publish in conjunction with their Sunday release on its site.

There was no reason to doubt WikiLeaks' claim; the website was inaccessible for much of Sunday, though several hundred cables were posted on its site by late afternoon. The cables, many of them classified, offer candid, sometimes unflattering assessments of foreign leaders, ranging from U.S. allies such as Germany and Italy to other nations like Libya, Iran and Afghanistan.

In a typical denial-of-service attack, remote computers commandeered by rogue programs bombard a website with so many data packets that it becomes overwhelmed and unavailable to visitors. Pinpointing the culprits is impossible because the Internet's structure does not allow for the tracing back of the data packets used in such attacks, computer security expert Bruce Schneier told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Hackers have used denial-of-service attacks over the years to target corporate and government websites.

Last month political bloggers in Vietnam said they were victimized by cyberattacks designed to block their websites to stifle government dissent. Other targets have included U.S. and South Korean government websites in 2009 and computer networks in Estonia, which were crippled for nearly three weeks in 2007 by what were believed to be Russian hackers.

In the weeks leading up to the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Georgian government and corporate websites were hit with denial-of-service attacks. The Kremlin denied involvement.

James Lewis, a cybersecurity expert and a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said it's unlikely the U.S. or some other government would use denial-of-service attacks against WikiLeaks.

His best guess is it's "a bunch of geeks who've decided they're annoyed with WikiLeaks."

"Denial of service is usually the amateur's approach," he told the AP on Sunday. "Usually it's the hacker community ..."

Lewis said he's never heard of the U.S. trying to attack a website like this.

"Usually they're more interested in exploiting, that is getting into WikiLeaks to figure out what's going on. Or they're interested in doing some kind of damage, and denial of service really doesn't do any damage."

Such an attack would only stall WikiLeaks, not prevent the information from being released.

Schneier also said he seriously doubts any U.S. government agency would be involved in such an attack because it amounts to a mere "nuisance" and could not stop WikiLeaks from releasing the diplomatic cables. He notes that there are many ways to distribute information online.

An encrypted file that was made available online using BitTorrent file-sharing technology in late July is believed to hold the cables. All WikiLeaks would need to do to unlock the file is distribute the key.

Clinton to visit Central Asia, Bahrain in aftermath of leak of sensitive diplomatic reports - 11/28
Associated Press / Not attributed

WASHINGTON (AP) - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is headed on a four-nation diplomatic tour to Central Asia and the Persian Gulf on the heels of Sunday's unauthorized release of a trove of sensitive State Department documents chronicling the behind-the-scenes conduct of U.S. foreign relations.

Clinton's trip, announced by State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley Sunday evening, had been planned long before hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables were released by WikiLeaks, the online anti-secrecy group, and published by The New York Times and newspapers in Europe.

Crowley said Clinton will begin her trip Tuesday in Kazakhstan, where she will head the U.S. delegation to a summit meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe -- the first top-level meeting of the 56-nation group in 11 years.

Clinton also will meet with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his foreign minister, Kanat Suadabayev. Nazarbayev has ruled Kazakhstan unchallenged since the late 1980s, when it was still part of the Soviet Union, and has been repeatedly re-elected by landslide victories.

Clinton also will visit Kyrgyzstan, which hosts a U.S. air base that is important for resupplying and ferrying U.S. troops in Afghanistan. She also will visit Uzbekistan and stop in the Persian Gulf nation of Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters.

Iran May Have Missiles From North Korea, WikiLeaks Cables Show - 11/29
Bloomberg / Viola Gienger and Miles Weiss

Nov. 29 (Bloomberg) -- Iran obtained 19 advanced missiles from North Korea, potentially giving the Islamic nation the capability of attacking Moscow and cities in Western Europe, according to embassy cables posted by WikiLeaks.org and provided to the New York Times.

U.S. officials denounced the release, coming on the eve of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's departure for a security conference in the Persian Gulf, as jeopardizing U.S. ties with foreign governments and endangering individuals. WikiLeaks began posting the cables yesterday.

The 19 North Korean BM-25 missiles, based on a Russian design known as the R-27, might give Iran the "building blocks" for producing long-range missiles, according to a Feb. 24 cable posted on WikiLeaks. The cable didn't provide specific evidence, according to the Times, which agreed not to publish the document at the Obama administration's request.

"North Korea and Iran have had a decades-long missile relationship and also most likely a nuclear relationship," said Bruce Klingner, an analyst at the Heritage Foundation in Washington and former chief of the Central Intelligence Agency's Korea branch. "The leaking of the classified documents provides a greater sense of confidence" for analysis conducted previously by outside experts and most recently illustrated in photos from a North Korean parade, he said.

Pressured the U.S.

Diplomatic cables posted by the Guardian, which also received advance copies from WikiLeaks, indicate as far back as early 2008 Saudi Arabia and other Arab governments pressed the U.S. for attacks on Iran to stop it getting a nuclear bomb, even as some expressed concern that a military strike might destabilize the region.

The Obama administration has won stiffer United Nations Security Council sanctions against Iran and sealed arms agreements such as a \$60 billion deal with Saudi Arabia over the next 10 years.

The State Department declined to confirm information in what WikiLeaks says is more than 250,000 documents, covering a period from December 1966 through February 2010.

"I can't provide veracity of anything WikiLeaks has released to the media," Nicole Thompson, a State Department spokeswoman, said in an interview, adding the agency's policy is to refrain from commenting on specific leaked materials.

About 9,000 documents were listed as containing information too sensitive to be shared with a foreign government, the New York Times said. None was listed as "top-secret," according to the Times.

Similar Tone

Along with the Guardian of the U.K., France's Le Monde, Spain's El Pais and Der Spiegel of Germany obtained the WikiLeaks documents.

On the threat from Iran, a cable posted by the Guardian quoted Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi ambassador to the U.S., as citing Saudi King Abdullah's "frequent exhortations to attack Iran and put an end" to the Iranian nuclear weapons program. The exchange took place in an April 20, 2008 meeting between al-Jubeir, then-U.S. Iraq Ambassador Ryan Crocker and U.S. Central Command commander General David Petraeus, the Guardian said.

A similar tone was struck by King Hamad of Bahrain in a Nov. 4, 2009 conversation with Petraeus.

King Hamad "pointed to Iran as the source of much trouble" in the region and "he argued forcefully to take action to terminate their nuclear program by whatever means necessary," according to a classified cable.

Hamad said "the danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it," according to the cable cited by the Guardian.

Increased Monitoring

Bahrain is home to the U.S. 5th Fleet headquarters. The cable also disclosed that the king agreed to a NATO request to base Awacs air surveillance aircraft in his nation as part of increased monitoring of Iran.

Israeli military officials 14 days later in a Nov. 18, 2009 meeting with U.S. State and Defense Department officials, including Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Shapiro, said 2010 would be a "critical year" for Iran's nuclear program and Israel's capability to attack, according to a cable posted by the Guardian.

"If the Iranians continue to protect and harden their nuclear sites, it will be more difficult to target and damage them," the cable said, summarizing Israel's concerns.

The cable said both sides discussed the need to avoid publicity for an "upcoming delivery" of GBU-28 bunker-buster bombs to Israel "to avoid any allegations that the U.S. is helping prepare for a strike against Iran."

Carrying Cash

The leaked documents include details about governments and officials, including an episode last year in which Afghanistan's then-vice president, Ahmed Zia Massoud, was found carrying \$52 million in cash while visiting the United Arab Emirates. Massoud denied taking any money out of Afghanistan, according to the Times.

According to another cable, a Chinese contact told the U.S. embassy in Beijing in January that China's Politburo directed an "intrusion" into Google Inc.'s local computer networks. The Google hacking was "part of a coordinated campaign of computer sabotage carried out by government operatives, private security experts and Internet outlaws recruited by the Chinese government," the New York Times said in its account of the WikiLeaks cables.

In July 2009, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi, then the defense supreme commander for the United Arab Emirates, declared that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad "is Hitler," the New York Times reported, citing the documents.

Republicans, Cables

The Obama administration said in a statement yesterday that embassy reporting to Washington "is candid and often incomplete information," not an expression of policy.

"Nevertheless, these cables could compromise private discussions with foreign governments and opposition leaders," according to the statement from the White House Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs.

Republicans also condemned the release of the cables, with Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina stating on "Fox News Sunday" that "the people at WikiLeaks could have blood on their hands."

WikiLeaks, a nonprofit group that posts information the government wants to keep confidential, previously released 400,000 documents in October related to the Iraq war and about 75,000 in July on the Afghan conflict.

An Army intelligence analyst named Bradley Manning was arrested in June at age 22 and charged with illegally releasing classified information. He had said in an online chat in May that the documents he downloaded included "260,000 State Department cables from embassies and consulates all over the world," the New York Times reported.

The Pentagon said yesterday it will take action to prevent future reoccurrences, such as monitoring user behavior in a way similar to steps taken by credit-card companies to detect fraud. The military will also conduct security oversight inspections at forward bases and remove the ability of classified computers to download information onto removable disks.

Israelis see PR windfall in Wikileaks tips on Iran - 11/29

Reuters / Dan Williams

JERUSALEM, Nov 29 (Reuters) - Wikileaks disclosures about U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to curb Iran's nuclear programme are a surprise public relations windfall for Israel, a former Israeli national security adviser said on Monday.

The secret cables leaked by the whistleblower website on Sunday showed Israel trying to prod a sometimes sceptical Washington into tougher action -- such as sanctions, subversion, and even a military strike by 2011 -- against Tehran.

But the documents also described Saudi Arabia urging the Americans to "cut off the head of the snake" by attacking Iran, a hawkishness echoed by other Arab leaders, and outline suspicions that North Korean missiles may have given the Iranians the range to reach western Europe and beyond. "These (disclosures) don't hurt Israel at all -- perhaps the opposite," said Giora Eiland, a retired Israeli general who served as national security adviser to former prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert.

"If there is something on the Iranian issue that, in my opinion, happens to help Israel, it is that these leaks show that Arab countries like Saudi Arabia are far more interested in Iran than they are in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example," Eiland told Israel Radio.

Commentator Sever Plotzker, writing in Israel's biggest newspaper, Yedioth Ahronoth, said "a single picture, sharp and clear" had emerged: "the entire world, not just Israel, is panicked over the Iranian nuclear programme".

Speaking ahead of the Wikileaks release, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to anticipate the potential embarrassment for Sunni Arabs who fear the rising Shiite power.

"In such matters (diplomacy) there is usually a gap between what is said in public and what is said in private. In Israel the gaps aren't so large, but in some of the other countries in the region the gaps are very large," Netanyahu told reporters.

MILITARY OPTION

Israel, which is reputed to have the region's only atomic arsenal, sees itself as uniquely threatened by the prospect of an Iranian bomb, but has long lobbied for foreign intervention.

Some analysts believe Israel lacks the armed clout to pull off a preventive strike, and may be reluctant to trigger a new Middle East war with Iran, which denies seeking nuclear arms.

According to Wikileaks, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates was asked in a closed meeting in February about a possible Israeli attack and responded "that he didn't know if they would be successful, but that Israel could carry out the operation". Another cable from May 2009 recounts Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak telling U.S. Congress members there was a six to 18-month opportunity to hit Iran without incurring "unacceptable collateral damage". Barak's deadline now looms.

While Eiland acknowledged that Wikileaks had reflected a degree of Israeli "exaggeration" but no major indiscretion.

"For now, at least, no state secret has come out here about operational plans, on intelligence capabilities," he said.

Wikileaks leak says Iran's Khamenei has cancer -paper - 11/29

Reuters / Catherine Bremer

PARIS, Nov 29 (Reuters) - U.S. diplomatic cables released by online whistle-blower Wikileaks include remarks from an Iran source in 2009 saying Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has terminal cancer, French daily Le Monde reported.

The source, a non-Iranian businessman based in Central Asia and travelling often to Tehran, "has learned from one of his contacts that (former president Ali Akbar) Rafsanjani told him Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has terminal stage leukaemia and could die in a few months", according to an August 2009 cable.

The document, written by a U.S. diplomat, says that Rafsanjani, a critic of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who has expressed sympathies with Iran's reformist movement, decided on learning of Khamenei's illness to start preparing himself to be a successor.

As Supreme Leader since 1989 Khamenei has final say on policy in the Islamic Republic, which is locked in a stand-off with key world powers over the nature of its nuclear activities.

The document cited by Le Monde is one of thousands of cables leaked by the Wikileaks website at the weekend that reveal confidential views and information from senior U.S. diplomats overseas that would normally remain confidential for decades.

Le Monde, one of a handful of newspapers around the world given access to the cables, said the Iran documents showed Washington relied on a network of Iran-watchers in the Middle East to shed light on a country it sees as an enigma.

The United States broke diplomatic relations with Iran 30 years ago after fundamentalist students in Iran seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held staff there hostage for 444 days.

U.S. tackled China over N.Korea nuclear trade-media - 11/29

Reuters / Jonathan Thatcher

SINGAPORE, Nov 29 (Reuters) - The United States has complained to Beijing several times over the transshipment of missile components from North Korea to Iran via China, the Guardian newspaper reported.

The report comes as China faces mounting international demands to bring its ally North Korea to heel following last week's bombardment of a South Korean island and reports it was at an advanced stage in a trying to enrich uranium, which would give it a second source of material for making atomic weapons.

On one occasion, three years ago, Washington pressed China to act "urgently" to halt a transshipment, the British daily said in report posted on its website on Sunday quoting U.S. diplomatic cables -- originally released by the website Wikileaks, some of which were made available to the Guardian and other media.

The United States has long expressed concern that the isolated North could become an illicit exporter of material for nuclear weapons, including to Iran.

The Guardian quoted an internal cable dated Nov. 3, 2007 and signed by then U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, as saying a North Korean cargo of missile jet vanes destined for the Shahid Bagheri Industrial Group, which runs Iran's solid-fuel ballistic missile programme, was due to be shipped to Iran from Beijing the following day aboard a scheduled Iran Air flight.

Rice instructed the U.S. ambassador to raise the issue "at the earliest opportunity" and "at the highest level possible" to persuade the Chinese authorities to halt the delivery.

The newspaper quoted another cable, sent by current Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in May, expressing concern that exports by named Chinese firms "could be used for or diverted to a CW [chemical weapons] programme". Clinton asked whether the suspect transfers were approved by the Chinese government and warns that sanctions may be imposed.

"We request that the Chinese government take all steps necessary to investigate this matter and to prevent Iran from acquiring dual-use equipment and technology that could be used in its CW program."

The cable noted that the United States had raised its concerns with Chinese officials on numerous occasions and listed at least 10 instances in which it said North Korean shipments of ballistic missiles parts to Iran passed unimpeded through Beijing.

Separately, the New York Times said the leaked cables showed that U.S. and South Korean officials have discussed the prospects for a unified Korea, should the North's economic troubles and political transition lead the state to implode.

The South Koreans even considered commercial inducements to China, according to the U.S. ambassador to Seoul. The New York Times quoted her as telling Washington in February that South Korean officials believed that the right business deals would help salve China's concerns about living with a reunified Korea that is in a "benign alliance" with the United States.

In a report last month, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) said that even though most believe China views North Korea's nuclear weapons programme as destabilising to the region, Beijing is not applying enough resources to detect and stop North Korea's illicit nuclear trade.

"As China seeks to be a global leader, it should also be willing to shoulder the responsibilities that attend such a status. Preventing nuclear proliferation is one of the most important global responsibilities," the report wrote.

WikiLeaks documents point to Turkish-US tensions - 11/28

Reuters / Ralph Boulton

LONDON, Nov 28 (Reuters) - U.S. diplomats have cast doubts on the reliability of NATO ally Turkey, portraying its leadership as divided and permeated by Islamists, according to the German Der Spiegel magazine's website.

Der Spiegel, citing U.S. diplomatic documents released on Sunday by whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks, said advisers to Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan were described as having "little understanding of politics beyond Ankara".

Erdogan has introduced sweeping liberal economic reforms in pursuit of European Union membership since his AK Party was first elected by a landslide in 2002. He denies accusations by secularists that he harbours secret Islamist ambitions.

Der Spiegel cited a cable as saying Erdogan had surrounded himself with an "iron ring of sycophantic (but contemptuous) advisors".

Turkey has traditionally close relations with Washington, but ties have been strained of late, partly as a result of Ankara's falling out with Israel over its invasion of Gaza. "The leaked diplomatic cables reveal that US diplomats are skeptical about Turkey's dependability as a partner ... The leadership in Ankara is depicted as divided and permeated by Islamists."

Der Spiegel's website gave few details or direct quotations from the cables but said its magazine would provide a broader account on Monday.

Amid WikiLeaks uproar, Clinton heads to Central Asia - 11/28

Reuters / Andrew Quinn

WASHINGTON, Nov 28 (Reuters) - Amid a global uproar over WikiLeaks' release of sensitive U.S. diplomatic cables, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton begins a trip to Central Asia and the Middle East on Monday, during which she may personally feel some heat from affronted allies.

The State Department on Sunday formally announced Clinton's trip, which takes her first to Kazakhstan where world leaders including Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are also expected to attend a summit of the 56-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In an illustration of the potential awkwardness, one cable is reported by Britain's Guardian newspaper as describing Medvedev as being in a partnership with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in which he "plays Robin to Putin's Batman."

Other documents cited by German news weekly Der Spiegel describe Merkel as someone who "avoids risk and is seldom creative" and her foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, as arrogant, vain and critical of America.

From Kazakhstan, Clinton travels to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, two other former Soviet republics in Central Asia which have been targets of U.S. criticism in the past, before heading to Bahrain to deliver a speech on the U.S. security role in a region jittery over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Clinton's Nov. 30-Dec. 3 trip was planned before Sunday's release of sensitive U.S. diplomatic communications provided by whistleblowing website WikiLeaks, which revealed sensitive U.S. views on foreign leaders, terrorism and nuclear proliferation in an embarrassing blow to U.S. diplomacy.

The U.S. government, informed in advance of the contents, has contacted governments around the world, including in Russia, Europe and the Middle East, to try to limit damage.

But the release nevertheless promises to complicate Clinton's mission, already overshadowed by the crisis on the Korean peninsula following North Korea's artillery attack on a South Korean island last week.

Among the revelations highlighted by the New York Times, one of five media organizations given early access to the WikiLeaks material, were reports that Saudi King Abdullah has repeatedly urged the United States to attack Iran's nuclear program, and China directed cyberattacks on the United States.

CHALLENGING PROGRAM

Other material indicates U.S. diplomats believe Saudi donors remain the chief financiers of Sunni militant groups like al Qaeda; that they have been unsuccessfully seeking to remove highly enriched uranium from Pakistan; and they have been talking to South Korean officials about the prospects of a reunified Korea in a "benign alliance" with Washington.

Clinton's official program will present its own challenges.

In Kazakhstan, the spotlight will fall on host President Nursultan Nazarbayev's pledges -- unfulfilled, according to human rights groups -- to improve democracy and human rights in his oil-rich country.

The two other Central Asian stops are both in countries which play important roles in the U.S.-led drive to oust the Taliban from nearby Afghanistan, but which have their own political problems.

Clinton is due to meet President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, which the U.S. State Department this year dubbed Central Asia's most authoritarian state but which nevertheless serves as a vital supply route for NATO operations in the Afghan conflict.

She will also stop for talks in Kyrgyzstan -- which hosts a major U.S. air transit facility for Afghanistan -- in an effort to push political reconciliation following an April uprising that included ethnic clashes.

Clinton's final stop in Bahrain will give her a chance to brief regional leaders on both the Iranian nuclear issue and U.S.-brokered Middle East peace talks, both of which appear to be hanging in limbo.

Tehran has expressed a readiness for discussions with major world powers on Dec. 5 but the details have yet to be worked out and it is unclear whether talks will get under way over a program Western nations fear aims to produce an atomic bomb. Iran says its nuclear program is to generate electricity.

In the Mideast, meanwhile, intensive U.S. diplomatic efforts to bring the Israelis and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table have yet to yield results, although U.S. officials are hopeful that new U.S. security guarantees for Israel may still allow direct talks to resume.

"Cut off head of snake" Saudis told US on Iran - 11/28

Reuters / Ross Colvin

WASHINGTON, Nov 28 (Reuters) - King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia repeatedly exhorted the United States to "cut off the head of the snake" by launching military strikes to destroy Iran's nuclear program, according to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables.

A copy of the cable dated April 20, 2008, was published in the New York Times website on Sunday after being released by the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks. The classified communication between the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh and Washington showed the Saudis feared Shi'ite Iran's rising influence in the region, particularly in neighboring Iraq.

The United States has repeatedly said that the military option is on the table, but at the same time U.S. military chiefs have made clear they view it as a last resort, fearing it could ignite wider conflict in the Middle East.

The April 2008 cable detailed a meeting between General David Petraeus, the top U.S. military commander in the Middle East, and then U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, and King Abdullah and other Saudi princes.

At the meeting, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adel al-Jubeir "recalled the King's frequent exhortations to the U.S. to attack Iran and so put an end to its nuclear weapons program," the cable said.

"He told you to cut off the head of the snake," Jubeir was reported to have said.

The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, however, pushed for tougher sanctions instead, including a travel ban and further restrictions on bank lending, although he did not rule out the need for military action.

The WikiLeaks documents also show U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates believes any military strike on Iran would only delay its pursuit of a nuclear weapon by one to three years, the Times reported.

"IRAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM MUST BE STOPPED"

Saudi Arabia, one of the world's top oil producers, is concerned about Iran's growing military strength. The United States announced last month that it plans to sell the kingdom \$60 billion worth of military aircraft to help it bolster its defenses.

Britain's Guardian newspaper, one of a number of publications to have had access to the leaked diplomatic cables, said the communications also showed that other Arab allies have secretly agitated for action against Tehran over its disputed nuclear program.

Another cable, sent from the U.S. Embassy in Manama, Bahrain, on Nov. 4, 2009, detailed a meeting between Petraeus and King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, whose kingdom is the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth fleet. Like Saudi Arabia it is a Sunni Muslim-ruled kingdom.

King Hamad argued "forcefully for taking action to terminate (Iran's) nuclear program, by whatever means necessary," the cable said.

"That program must be stopped," he was quoted as saying. "The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it."

According to an April 2006 cable from the U.S. embassy in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates believed "the threat from al Qaeda would be minor if Iran has nukes," but that it was reluctant to take any action that might provoke its neighbor.

The emirate's rulers told U.S. officials they should only seek their help as a "very last resort. If you can solve something without involving the UAE, please do so," the cable said.

Iran denies its nuclear program is a cover to build a nuclear bomb and says it is purely for peaceful purposes.

A U.N. Security Council resolution passed in June, imposing a fourth round of sanctions, renewed a call on Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, something Tehran has explicitly refused to do, saying such activity is its right under international law.

The top U.S. military officer, Admiral Mike Mullen, said in comments released on Friday that the U.S. military has been thinking about military options on Iran "for a significant period of time", but he stressed that diplomacy remained the focus of U.S. efforts.

ANALYSIS-WikiLeaks shows 21st-century secrets harder to keep

Reuters / Peter Apps

LONDON, Nov 29 (Reuters Life!) - The diplomatic cables so far released by WikiLeaks might embarrass U.S. diplomats but probably won't shatter any international relationships.

The key lesson so far seems to be just how much easier the information age has made it to steal vast quantities of data -- and how much harder it is to keep secrets.

The U.S. and other governments have been keen to talk up the potential diplomatic damage from the release of some 250,000 cables, details of which began to be published on Sunday by Western newspapers.

The cables, some of which were released in full and some only in part, revealed confidential -- and often unflattering -- views and information from senior U.S. diplomats based overseas that would normally have been kept confidential for decades.

Experts and former officials are divided over the impact. Speaking before the release, Italy's foreign minister Franco Frattini said he feared it would prove the "9/11 of diplomacy" and would "blow up the trust between states".

Others are much more sanguine, and believe diplomats will continue their long tradition of politeness in public and brutal honesty in the reports back home.

"This won't restrain dips' (diplomats) candour," Sir Christopher Meyer, a former British Ambassador to Washington DC, told Reuters. "But people will be looking at the security of electronic communications and archives. Paper would have been impossible to steal in these quantities."

That's a lesson governments have been learning fast. British officials have been embarrassed several times by the loss of discs containing personal data for thousands of members of the general public, while experts say hackers have stolen truckloads of sensitive information from Western corporates.

In the case of the latest release -- as with years' worth of U.S. military logs on the Iraq and Afghanistan conflict earlier this year -- the cables appear to have been stolen by just one person. U.S. Army private Bradley Manning has been charged with leaking classified information and is in military custody.

JEOPARDISING DIPLOMACY?

"Whoever was behind this leak should be shot and I would volunteer to pull the trigger," said former U.S. cyber Security and counterterrorism official Roger Cressey, describing it as "pretty devastating".

"The essence of our foreign policy is our ability to talk straight and honest with our foreign counterparts and to keep those conversations out of the public domain. This massive leak puts that most basic of diplomatic requirements at risk in the future."

Cressey points to sensitive relations with Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, both key to U.S. strategy against Islamic militancy. The cables include criticism of both countries and details of conversations with their senior officials.

Some western leaders reportedly come in for criticism, including British Prime Minister David Cameron. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is described as risk-averse and "rarely creative".

"It is a sign that in the information age, it is very difficult to keep anything secret," said Professor Michael Cox, associate fellow at London think tank Chatham House.

"But as to whether it is going to cause the kind of seismic collapse of international relations that governments have been talking about, I somehow doubt. Diplomats have always said rude things about each other in private, and everyone has always known that."

Some of those who should be most aware of security had been tripped up by the new information age. Last year, security experts were left aghast after the new head of Britain's secret intelligence service MI6's wife posted family photos and details on Facebook. Other officials have been forced to apologise after tongue-in-cheek e-mails have ended up in the public domain.

The real beneficiaries from the vast leak, Cox said, were historians, academics and students of international relations who now had a "great treasure trove" of primary evidence to go through. The volume of data is so vast that details may continue to be extracted from it for years to come.

JUST WHAT NATIONS DO?

But much remains secret. There are cables, for example, asking U.S. diplomats to forward sensitive information on a variety of national leaders and senior politicians. But that information was sent through more secure channels reserved for sensitive intelligence, and remains largely unpublished.

"Governments have a tendency to keep as much information as possible secret or classified, whether it really needs to be or not," said Chatham House fellow Cox.

"The really secret information, I would suggest, is still pretty safe and probably won't end up on WikiLeaks."

What was more worrying, he said, was the apparent ferocity of government campaigns against the whistleblowing website. WikiLeaks complained it was the victim of a cyber attack shortly before the data was released on Sunday, and says sexual assault accusations in Sweden against its founder Julian Assange are also orchestrated by its enemies.

For now, experts say the diplomats in Washington and elsewhere will hurry to reassure allies and soothe ruffled egos. Some may find they are less trusted -- particularly now other nations have seen the cables encouraging diplomats to effectively also function as spies.

Former U.S. counterterrorism official Fred Burton, now vice president for risk consultancy Stratfor, said some long-term intelligence-sharing agreements might be jeopardised and the State Department would now be focused on "serious damage control".

"But this is what nations do," he said. "Rule number one in this business. There are no friendly intelligence services."

U.S. sees top German diplomat arrogant-WikiLeaks - 11/28

Reuters / Brian Rohan

BERLIN, Nov 28 (Reuters) - U.S. diplomats describe German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle as arrogant, vain and critical of America, documents released on Sunday by whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks showed.

The reports were part of a bundle of over 250,000 U.S. State Department documents obtained by WikiLeaks and distributed to media in the United States and Europe, and which have revealed sensitive information and candid views of foreign leaders.

The documents, published in Germany by news weekly Der Spiegel, included 1,719 diplomatic cables from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin -- which showed diplomats giving frank assessments of high-ranking politicians including Chancellor Angela Merkel.

"She avoids risk and is seldom creative," one U.S. diplomat cited by Der Spiegel wrote of the Chancellor, who was referred to as 'Teflon Merkel' in some reports.

"The Americans consider the chancellor to view international diplomacy above all from the perspective of how she can profit from it domestically," the Spiegel report added.

While the reports are candid towards Merkel, they underline overwhelmingly how U.S. diplomats find it easier to work with her than with Westerwelle, who received the harshest criticism.

He is described as having an "exuberant personality" that sometimes leads to conflict with Merkel, but little foreign policy experience and an ambivalent view towards the U.S.

"There was a consensus among desk officers -- driven, perhaps, by political bias -- that Westerwelle was arrogant and too fixated on maintaining his 'cult of personality'," said a report written before Westerwelle became foreign minister.

PARTY STRATEGY

Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, Germany's most popular politician, was seen in a better light: "a close and well-known friend of the USA" who did not hesitate to give the embassy insight about internal German politics.

The reports said Guttenberg told U.S. Ambassador Philip Murphy that Westerwelle, not the opposition Social Democrats, was the real barrier to an increase in German troop strength in Afghanistan sought by Washington.

Murphy is quoted as welcoming information from a "young, up-and-coming party loyalist", from Westerwelle's Free Democrats (FDP) who gave the embassy detailed reports on party strategy.

"Excited with his role as FDP negotiations note-taker, he seemed happy to share his observations and insights and read to us directly from his notes," Murphy was quoted as writing.

The release of the documents prompted Murphy to write letters to several German newspapers to say his embassy work was normal, and that he did not regret it even if it may make waves.

"It's hard to say what effect it will have, but it will at the very least be uncomfortable -- for my government, for those mentioned in the reports, and for me personally as American Ambassador to Germany," he wrote in Bild am Sonntag.

PRINT | ONLINE

Media Shouldn't Protect Power from Embarrassment - 11/28

Alternet.com / Simon Jenkins

Is it justified? Should a newspaper disclose virtually all a nation's secret diplomatic communication, illegally downloaded by one of its citizens? The reporting in the Guardian of the first of a selection of 250,000 US state department cables marks a recasting of modern diplomacy. Clearly, there is no longer such a thing as a safe electronic archive, whatever computing's snake-oil salesmen claim. No organisation can treat digitised communication as confidential. An electronic secret is a contradiction in terms.

Anything said or done in the name of a democracy is, *prima facie*, of public interest. When that democracy purports to be "world policeman" – an assumption that runs ghostlike through these cables – that interest is global. Nonetheless, the Guardian had to consider two things in abetting disclosure, irrespective of what is anyway published by WikiLeaks. It could not be party to putting the lives of individuals or sources at risk, nor reveal material that might compromise ongoing military operations or the location of special forces.

In this light, two backup checks were applied. The US government was told in advance the areas or themes covered, and "representations" were invited in return. These were considered. Details of "redactions" were then shared with the other four media recipients of the material and sent to WikiLeaks itself, to establish, albeit voluntarily, some common standard.

The state department knew of the leak several months ago and had ample time to alert staff in sensitive locations. Its pre-emptive scaremongering over the weekend stupidly contrived to hint at material not in fact being published. Nor is the material classified top secret, being at a level that more than 3 million US government employees are cleared to see, and available on the defence department's internal Siprnet. Such dissemination of "secrets" might be thought reckless, suggesting a diplomatic outreach that makes the British empire seem minuscule.

The revelations do not have the startling, coldblooded immediacy of the WikiLeaks war logs from Iraq and Afghanistan, with their astonishing insight into the minds of fighting men seemingly detached from the ethics of war. The disclosures are largely of analysis and high-grade gossip. Insofar as they are sensational, it is in showing the corruption and mendacity of those in power, and the mismatch between what they claim and what they do.

Few will be surprised to know that Vladimir Putin runs the world's most sensational kleptocracy, that the Saudis wanted the Americans to bomb Iran, or that Pakistan's ISI is hopelessly involved with Taliban groups of fiendish complexity. We now know that Washington knows too. The full extent of American dealings with Yemen might upset that country's government, but is hardly surprising. If it is true that the Pentagon targeted refugee camps for bombing, it should be of general concern. American congressmen might also be interested in the sums of money given to certain foreign generals supposedly to pay for military equipment.

The job of the media is not to protect power from embarrassment. If American spies are breaking United Nations rules by seeking the DNA biometrics of the UN director general, he is entitled to hear of it. British voters should know what Afghan leaders thought of British troops. American (and British) taxpayers might question, too, how most of the billions of dollars going in aid to Afghanistan simply exits the country at Kabul airport.

No harm is done by high-class chatter about President Nicolas Sarkozy's vulgarity and lack of house-training, or about the British royal family. What the American embassy in London thinks about the coalition suggests not an alliance at risk but an embassy with a talent problem.

Some stars shine through the banality such as the heroic envoy in Islamabad, Anne Patterson. She pleads that Washington's whole policy is counterproductive: it "risks destabilising the Pakistani state, alienating both the civilian government and the military leadership, and provoking a broader governance crisis without finally achieving the goal". Nor is any amount of money going to bribe the Taliban to our side. Patterson's cables are like missives from the Titanic as it already heads for the bottom.

The money-wasting is staggering. Aid payments are never followed, never audited, never evaluated. The impression is of the world's superpower roaming helpless in a world in which nobody behaves as bidden. Iran, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, the United Nations, are all perpetually off script. Washington reacts like a wounded bear, its instincts imperial but its power projection unproductive.

America's foreign policy is revealed as a slave to rightwing drift, terrified of a bomb exploding abroad or of a pro-Israeli congressman at home. If the cables tell of the progress to war over Iran or Pakistan or Gaza or Yemen, their revelation might help debate the inanity of policies which, as Patterson says, seem to be leading in just that direction. Perhaps we can now see how catastrophe unfolds when there is time to avert it, rather than having to await a Chilcot report after the event. If that is not in the public's interest, I fail to see what is.

Clearly, it is for governments, not journalists, to protect public secrets. Were there some overriding national jeopardy in revealing them, greater restraint might be in order. There is no such overriding jeopardy, except from the policies themselves as revealed. Where it is doing the right thing, a great power should be robust against embarrassment.

What this saga must do is alter the basis of diplomatic reporting. If WikiLeaks can gain access to secret material, by whatever means, so presumably can a foreign power. Words on paper can be made secure, electronic archives not. The leaks have blown a hole in the framework by which states guard their secrets. The Guardian material must be a breach of the official secrets acts. But coupled with the penetration already allowed under freedom of information, the walls round policy formation and documentation are all but gone. All barriers are permeable. In future the only secrets will be spoken ones. Whether that is a good thing should be a topic for public debate.

U.S. fears Iran has long-range missile, but Russia calls it a 'myth' - 11/28

CNN.com / Laurie Ure

Washington (CNN) -- The United States believes that North Korea is supplying Iran with long-range missiles, suggesting Iran has strike capabilities are stronger than discussed in public, according to one of the leaked U.S. diplomatic cables released Sunday.

The issue was raised by American diplomats in a high level-meeting with their Russian counterparts in late 2009, but the Russians expressed doubt on the U.S. concern, according to the cable. The revelation is in one of the documents published by WikiLeaks, the online whistleblower website that began releasing a cache of more than 250,000 cables Sunday.

The document, dated February 24 and labeled "secret," details a meeting between the United States and Russia in which U.S. representatives expressed belief that North Korea supplied Iran with missiles.

The cable cites the U.S. belief that 19 BM-25 missiles were shipped to Iran in 2005. According to Jane's, a weapons research company, the missiles are reported to have a range somewhere between 2,500 and 4,000 km (1,560 to 2,500 miles).

The Russians expressed doubts about the claim, citing lack of evidence, the cable states. But the Americans countered that some countries have offered direct evidence, and said they would try to bring further evidence to future meetings.

The United States believes that Iran wanted the missiles for the propulsion technology. But in an exchange described in the cable, U.S. and Russian officials debated whether North Korea even had the BM-25 missile at all, and the Russians asked whether the United States had any images of the missile.

"The U.S. did not, but noted that North Korea had paraded the missile through the streets of Pyongyang. Russia disagreed," the cable noted. The Russians countered that a review of the video of that parade showed a different video and "the missile appears to be a myth."

In what the cable describes as a "vigorous session of questions and answers" discussing ballistic missile threats, Russia detailed its assessment of Iran's missile program, and the degree to which Russia believes these programs constitute threats that would require missile defense responses. The cable said Russia believes Iran's "success" is that it has created Shahab-3 missiles that can reach targets in the Middle East and southeastern Europe, but they cannot do substantial damage with conventional warheads.

According to the cable, the Russian Defense Ministry's Evgeny Zudin said that although Iran can build prototypes of long-range systems, it lacks structural materials such as high-quality aluminum to do so, and it also does not have the materials necessary for the kind of mass production that would make it a security threat at the moment or in the near future.

Russia believes although Iran might be able to begin a ballistic missile program with a 2,000- to 3000-mile (3,200- to 4,800-km) range after 2015, it does not see Iran moving in this direction. Russia has instead concluded that Iran's ballistic missile program is directed toward developing combat-ready missiles to address regional concerns, the cable states.

"In their analysis, the missile programs of Iran and the [North Koreans] are not sufficiently developed, and their intentions to use missiles against the U.S. or Russia are nonexistent, thus not constituting a "threat" requiring the deployment of missile defenses," the cable's author noted.

WikiLeaks documents reveal Arab states' anxiety over Iran - 11/28

CNN.com / Tim Lister

(CNN) -- U.S. diplomatic cables obtained by the website WikiLeaks and published by newspapers in the United States and Europe on Sunday reveal considerable anxiety among the Gulf states about Iran's nuclear program, with the Bahrain's king warning, "The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it."

The cables, some marked "Secret," were among several hundred thousand obtained by WikiLeaks and published by

They reveal great concern among Arab states about Iran's regional ambitions. One cable describes a meeting between Saudi King Abdullah and White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan and other U.S. officials in March 2009.

According to the cable, the king told the Americans what he had just told the Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki. "You as Persians have no business meddling in Arab matters," the Saudi monarch was quoted as telling Mottaki. "Iran's goal is to cause problems," he told Brennan. "There is no doubt something unstable about them."

The king was also highly critical of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al Maliki. He is reported to have told his American visitors: "I don't trust this man.... he's an Iranian agent." The cable continues: "The King said he had told both (former U.S. President George W.) Bush and former Vice President (Dick) Cheney: 'How can I meet with someone I don't trust?'"

King Abdullah also welcomed the election of President Barack Obama. "Thank God for bringing Obama to the presidency," he is reported as saying, adding that it had created "great hope" in the Muslim world.

New leaks in 'public's interest'

According to another cable, King Hamadbin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain told the commander of U.S. Central Command, Gen. David H. Petraeus, that Iran was the "source of much of the trouble in both Iraq and Afghanistan."

The cable, sent in November 2009 by the U.S. ambassador in Bahrain, added that the king had "argued forcefully for taking action to terminate their nuclear program, by whatever means necessary. 'That program must be stopped,' he said.

Another cable reveals that in the neighboring United Arab Emirates, Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan told a congressional delegation last February that "if Iran goes nuclear, others in the region will move forward on the same track, and the nuclear nonproliferation treaty will completely break down."

According to a cable about the meeting sent by the U.S. ambassador on February 22, the minister added that "a crisis or confrontation in the region would create oil supply problems worldwide."

There was similar apprehension in Egypt about Iran. In a cable sent in February 2009, the U.S. ambassador in Cairo recounted: "President Mubarak told Senator Mitchell during his recent visit here that he did not oppose our talking with the Iranians, as long as 'you don't believe a word they say.'"

The cable referred to former Sen. George Mitchell, the Obama administration's special Middle East envoy.

According to the cable, the ambassador continued: "Mubarak has a visceral hatred for the Islamic Republic, referring repeatedly to Iranians as 'liars,' and denouncing them for seeking to destabilize Egypt and the region."

A cable from the U.S. ambassador in Oman, meanwhile, quotes the country's Armed Forces Chief, Lt. Gen. Ali bin Majidal-Ma'amari, as saying that "with Iran's continued attitude on the nuclear issue, the security situation in Iraq would remain unresolved."

Citing Oman's preference for a non-military solution, he nevertheless acknowledged that a nuclear-armed Iran as opposed to war with Iran posed "an extremely difficult dilemma for all of us," the cable continued.

There is advice in another cable about to handle Iran.

According to a readout of a November 2007 briefing from the then-British ambassador in Tehran, Geoffrey Adams, the UK envoy had "recommended being steady and firm, tough but not aggressive, and at the same time, seeking to engage."

The cable says: "He stressed that Iranians are obsessed with the West and this obsession at times blinds them to their interests."

WikiLeaks: US diplomats make fun of EU leaders, spy on EU citizens - 11/28

EUobserver.com / Valentina Pop

EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - American diplomats speak about EU leaders in terms of "Teflon Merkel," "authoritarian Sarkozy" and a "feckless, vain and ineffective Berlusconi" who is a "mouthpiece" for Russia, a first batch of secret cables sent to and from US embassies abroad and published by WikiLeaks shows.

The latest release of the whistle-blowing website, which recently published US war logs from Afghanistan and Iraq exposing war crimes and torture, began on Sunday evening (28 November) and will carry on throughout the next months until all 251,287 intercepted embassy cables are online.

The documents, dating from 1966 until the end of February 2010, are the largest set of confidential documents ever to be released into the public domain. The move comes amid the US government's repeated warning to WikiLeaks that it will compromise relations with allies and military operations abroad.

"The documents will give people around the world an unprecedented insight into US Government foreign activities" and expose "the extent of US spying on its allies," a statement on the WikiLeaks site says.

A first batch of documents, already processed by leading newspapers in Britain, Germany, Spain and the US, offers unflattering comments about European leaders and gives precise details about how US diplomats stationed in Europe should gather personal data such as email passwords and credit card data of European citizens.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, is described as "avoiding risk" and being "seldom creative." A cable issued on 9 September 2009, three weeks before the parliamentary elections which swept her back into power, bears the headline: "Chancellor Angela 'Teflon' Merkel takes limelight as FDP waits in the wings."

Her foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, is seen as "arrogant" and "fixated on maintaining his 'cult of personality'," US diplomats note. They almost call him a liar, when reporting a meeting with the US ambassador following a crucial vote in the European Parliament in February, when the legislature rejected a data transfer deal with the US, known as the "Swift agreement."

"His comment that he was unable to affect the vote in the EU Parliament on TFTP [Terrorism Finance Tracking Program] was a bit disingenuous; on 4 February, an MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] official acknowledged to visiting Treasury officials in Berlin that German MEPs were in fact leading the charge against TFTP in the EU Parliament with the tacit support of the FDP [Mr Westerwelle's party], if not of specialists in the Justice Ministry and MFA themselves," the cable reads.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy is described as having a "thin-skinned and authoritarian personal style," with US diplomats noting his tendency to noisily rebuke his team and the French prime minister, Francois Fillon.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is "feckless, vain, and ineffective as a modern European leader," according to Elizabeth Dibble, the US charge d'affaires in Rome. In reference to lavish parties and numerous scandals involving young escort girls, the US embassy noted that Mr Berlusconi is a "physically and politically weak" leader whose "frequent late nights and penchant for partying hard mean he does not get sufficient rest."

As for the Italian leader's growing fondness of Russian premier Vladimir Putin, the Rome embassy expressed its concern in 2009 over the "lavish gifts," lucrative energy contracts and a "shadowy" Russian-speaking Italian go-between. US diplomats even went as far as saying that Mr Berlusconi "appears increasingly to be the mouthpiece of Putin" in Europe.

Mr Putin himself was dubbed an "alpha dog" by the US embassy in Moscow, while the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, "plays Robin to Putin's Batman." In a separate report, Mr Medvedev is described as "pale and hesitant" and having "none of the bravado" of the former KGB officer who is now, technically, his subordinate.

Regional leaders such as Chechnya's Ramzan Kadyrov, also came to the attention of American diplomats.

In a 2006 cable, Mr Kadyrov was spotted bringing "a five-kilo lump of gold" as a gift to a lavish wedding in Dagestan, where drunken guests were throwing \$100 bills at child dancers, while nighttime water-scooters zig-zagged around on the Caspian Sea.

German regional politicians also make it into the cables sent to Washington. On 16 February, the US consulate in Munich, Bavaria's capital, reported on a meeting with Horst Seehofer, the leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU), Ms Merkel's sister party in Germany's wealthiest state.

"An unpredictable politician," Mr Seehofer "revealed only shallow foreign policy expertise" and "seemed uninformed about basic things," for instance that his state, Bavaria, hosts 20,000 out of a total of 40,000 US soldiers stationed in Germany.

Entire countries are mocked too: the Belgian government was told that accepting Guantanamo inmates would be "a low-cost way for Belgium to attain prominence in Europe." Slovenia was told to take a prisoner if its leader wanted to meet with President Obama.

Spying diplomats

Other news likely to resonate loudly is the detailed "human intelligence" gathering US diplomats are being instructed to perform in Europe, blurring the traditional demarcation line between spies and government envoys.

A cable on Bulgarian "reporting and collection needs" dating back to 16 June 2009 reads that "intelligence on the rule of law, corruption, and crime in the national leadership is the top priority of a directive issued to diplomats in the months ahead of secretary of state Hillary Clinton's meeting with her Bulgarian counterpart."

Reporting officers are requested to include "as much of the following information as possible" on Bulgarian citizens in their texts: names, organisational titles, private phone numbers, email addresses, credit account numbers, frequent flyer numbers and work schedules.

"Details about organized crime groups, including leadership, links to government and foreign entities, drug and human trafficking, credit card fraud, and computer-related crimes, including child pornography," are also listed on the diplomats' to-do-lists.

"Corruption among senior officials, including off-budget financial flows in support of senior leaders," is another area to be worked on, as well as "assessment, vulnerability, personality, financial, health, and biometric information about current and emerging leaders and advisers."

According to the New York Times, whose reporters analysed hundreds of cables prior to the Sunday release, "the more intrusive personal information diplomats are now being asked to gather could be used by the National Security Agency for data mining and surveillance operations. A frequent-flier number, for example, could be used to track the travel plans of foreign officials."

The details emerge just as a number of Nordic countries have launched investigations into alleged spying by the local US embassies on regular citizens, after Norwegian public TV uncovered that Washington secretly commissioned surveillance of hundreds of Norwegian nationals believed to pose a threat to US interests, such as the embassy in Oslo.

Washington has repeatedly denied that its diplomats are engaged in any illegal activities.

"Our diplomats are just that, diplomats," foreign affairs spokesman Philip J. Crowley told the New York Times on Sunday. "They represent our country around the world and engage openly and transparently with representatives of foreign governments and civil society. Through this process, they collect information that shapes our policies and actions. This is what diplomats, from our country and other countries, have done for hundreds of years."

State Department: U.S. diplomats aren't doing anything wrong in collecting information – 11/28 *ForeignPolicy.com / Josh Rogin*

U.S. diplomats collecting personal information on foreign officials is neither new nor unusual, multiple State Department officials told The Cable, in response to the release of hundreds of thousands of sensitive diplomatic messages by the self-described whistleblower website WikiLeaks.

One of the most discussed of the more than 200 diplomatic cables WikiLeaks has released from its reported cache of over 250,000 is a July 31, 2009 cable sent from Washington to several diplomatic missions entitled, "Reporting and collection

needs: The United Nations." Classified as SECRET by Michael Owens, the State Department's acting director for operations at the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), the cable outlines a long list of personal information the U.S. intelligence community wanted U.S. diplomats to collect about U.N. and foreign officials, including cell phone numbers, e-mail addresses, internet "handles," passwords, credit card account numbers, and frequent flyer account numbers.

The new National HUMINT Collection Directive was only one of several that asked U.S. diplomats to collect human intelligence around the world, has been roundly portrayed in domestic and foreign media as directing diplomats to act as intelligence assets. The U.K.'s Guardian newspaper's article was entitled, "US diplomats spied on UN leadership." The New York Times said that the cables "appear to blur the traditional boundaries between statesmen and spies."

But in an interview with The Cable on Sunday evening, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said that these activities did not mean that U.S. diplomats were being asked to act as intelligence assets.

"Our diplomats are just that, diplomats," Crowley said. "They represent our country around the world and engage openly and transparently with representatives of foreign governments and civil society. Through this process, they collect information that shapes our policies and actions. This is what diplomats, from our country and other countries, have done for hundreds of years."

Another State Department senior official objected to the contention that these directives came from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, despite the fact that they are marked as being from "SECSTATE." Germany's Der Spiegel, in their write up of the State Department cables, called them "Orders from Clinton."

"The long-standing practice at the State Department is to include the secretary's name at the end of every cable sent from Washington," Undersecretary of State for Management Patrick Kennedy told The Cable. "This practice has not included that the secretary review or approve the hundreds of thousands of cables sent each year."

But the leaked directives to U.S. diplomats to report about foreign officials are causing considerable angst inside the State Department, where many officials believe that the nature of the communiqués are being misreported and misinterpreted.

"What this cable represents is an annual wish list from intelligence managers that just highlights for the U.S. government issues of particular interest and just asks if they come across any of these areas in the course of their normal duties that they report it through appropriate channels," one State Department official told The Cable on background basis.

"Overseas, it's being misconstrued that the Secretary of State is tasking diplomats to do intelligence duties, and that's not the case," the official said.

At their Foggy Bottom headquarters, State has set up an internal working group that is working in shifts around the clock, "monitoring the situation and supporting our senior staff and embassies around the world," the official said. "We follow the same process whenever a major event occurs."

Specifically, the cables show that U.S. diplomats in New York were asked to collect Biographic and biometric information on ranking North Korean diplomats. Separate cables disclosed on Sunday show that U.S. diplomats overseas were asked for specific reporting on officials from the Palestinian territories, Paraguay, Bulgaria, and Africa's Great Lakes region.

The State Department officials emphasized to The Cable the distinction between diplomats who collect information as part of a wide range of duties and intelligence personnel, who have a singular and specific mission. The official also argued that other countries do the same thing and that the intelligence gathered by U.S. diplomats also benefits Washington's allies.

"Information collection is something that diplomats of every country do every day. These areas of particular interest, they're not just ours," the official said. "This is information that's of use to us, and to our allies and friends with whom we're trying to solve regional and global challenges."

"We're not asking our diplomats to do anything substantially different from what they've been doing for eons," the official continued. "Every diplomat and mission around the world is doing the same thing."

White House condemns WikiLeaks dump as first nuggets surface - 11/28

Hill.com / Bridget Johnson

The White House condemned "in the strongest terms" Sunday the anticipated leak of three million classified documents, including hundreds of thousands of State Department cables that have sent the administration scrambling to stem the damage in advance.

But early leaks showed that there might be a lot to repair, from comments that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has "none of the bravado" of "Alpha Male" Vladimir Putin to noting that Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi has a "luxuriant blonde nurse."

French President Nicolas Sarkozy is referred to as a "naked emperor," while Afghan President Hamid Karzai is said to be "driven by paranoia."

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said in a statement Sunday afternoon that the contents of the diplomatic correspondence "can deeply impact not only US foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends around the world."

The White House warned that not only would diplomats and intelligence officials be put at risk, but individuals working for human rights in oppressive regimes.

"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," the statement said. "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."

While the world was waiting for the documents to be leaked, pages of one of the newspapers granted early access to the documents, Der Spiegel, were leaked early.

That leak came minutes after WikiLeaks claimed it was under cyberattack, but vowed that its media partners would release the documents if they couldn't get the site up in time.

Spiegel wrote on its website that of the 251,287 leaked cables and State Department directives, "six percent of the reports, or 16,652 cables, are labelled as 'secret,' and of those, 4,330 are so explosive that they are labelled 'NOFORN,' meaning access should not be made available to non-US nationals."

"Taken together, the cables provide enough raw text to fill 66 years worth of weekly SPIEGEL magazines," the site said.

According to Spiegel, State Department staff have also been instructed to spy on United Nations staffers and get info such as credit-card and frequent-flyer numbers.

"Contrary to some #WikiLeaks' reporting, our diplomats are diplomats," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley tweeted Sunday evening. "They are not intelligence assets."

"In another [cable], US diplomats reveal that the attempt to persuade different countries to accept Guantanamo inmates turned into a downright bazaar, with offers of accepting prisoners being made in exchange for development aid or a visit by President Barack Obama," Der Spiegel writes.

On the sensitive topic of Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is referred to as "Hitler" and Sheikh bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi is said to believe "a near term conventional war with Iran is clearly preferable to the long term consequences of a nuclear armed Iran."

Some of the cables are apparently more gossipy than political, like quipping about the plastic surgeries of the wife of Azerbaijan leader Ilham Aliyev.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-Mass.) blasted the document dump in a Sunday afternoon statement.

"The release of classified information under these circumstances is a reckless action which jeopardizes lives by exposing raw, contemporaneous intelligence," Kerry said. "This is not an academic exercise about freedom of information and it is not akin to the release of the Pentagon Papers, which involved an analysis aimed at saving American lives and exposing government deception.

"Instead, these sensitive cables contain candid assessments and analysis of ongoing matters and they should remain confidential to protect the ability of the government to conduct lawful business with the private candor that's vital to effective diplomacy."

The likely incoming chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), said in a statement Sunday that those who leak and publish the classified information "are doing great harm to our nation."

"It is deeply disturbing that a few individuals seem to have deemed themselves worthy of deciding that scores of classified and sensitive material should be paraded about for our enemies to review and use against us," Ros-Lehtinen said. "These leaks come at the expense of U.S. security and, potentially, American lives."

U.S. diplomats ordered to gather data on counterparts, WikiLeaks releases show – 11/29

Los Angeles Times / Paul Richter and Ken Dilanian

U.S. diplomats have been directed by Washington to gather detailed data on their foreign counterparts, including the kinds of information usually sought by spies, according to diplomatic cables made public Sunday.

The cables, part of the WikiLeaks website's massive release of secret U.S. dispatches, show that diplomats have been asked to gather counterparts' credit card and frequent flier numbers, iris scans, as well as information on their Internet identities and the telecommunications networks they use.

The activities are laid out in dispatches that describe how the diplomats must fulfill their obligations under a previously undisclosed program called the National Humint Collection Directive. In the intelligence world, "Humint" is an abbreviation for "human intelligence."

U.S. and other intelligence agencies often have assigned agents to work overseas under diplomatic cover. But if foreign governments became convinced that U.S. diplomats frequently function as spies, it could put at risk their ability to conduct normal diplomatic activities and increase the odds that they could be expelled for espionage, a retired diplomat said Sunday.

It was not immediately clear from the documents when the program had started, whether diplomats had resisted it or whether any had provided information that turned out to be particularly valuable.

The cables, dating from the Bush administration in 2008 to the Obama administration in 2009, also show the State Department had a keen interest in the activities of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his staff.

A cable from July 2009 instructs U.S. diplomats to gather personal information on U.N. officials, including cellphone numbers, pagers and faxes; Internet and intranet user names; e-mail addresses; credit card and frequent flier account numbers; and work schedules.

It asked diplomats to pass on to the intelligence community the "plans and intentions" of U.N. officials who work on key issues, including Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea. Diplomats are also asked to seek "biographic and biometric" information on North Korean representatives to the United Nations.

In an April 2009 cable, diplomats are ordered to gather information on officials of certain African countries, including "e-mail addresses, telephone and fax numbers, fingerprints, facial images, DNA, and iris scans."

E-mail addresses and frequent flier numbers are valuable to the National Security Agency, which specializes in intercepting telephone and computer communications, to track the movements and conversations of foreign officials.

The cables tied to the Humint program were sent to embassies in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, as well as the U.S. mission to the United Nations. They were signed by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton or her predecessor, Condoleezza Rice.

State Department officials sought to minimize Clinton's role. Patrick Kennedy, the undersecretary of State for management, said in a statement Sunday evening that "the long-standing practice at the State Department is to include the secretary's name at the end of every cable sent from Washington."

But this practice did not mean that the secretary had reviewed or approved the hundreds of thousands of cables sent each year, he said.

Wayne E. White, a former senior official with the State Department's intelligence arm, said some of the activities of diplomats described in the cables are routine, such as gathering information on foreign officials' biographies, tastes, family life, work schedule and contact information. The State Department wants to know what it can about the activities and personal tastes of key officials, he said.

But detailed financial information, such as credit card numbers and frequent flier identification numbers, "strikes me as odd," White said.

The disclosure that U.S. diplomats have been seeking such information "could upset a number of foreign governments," he said.

Philip J. Crowley, the chief State Department spokesman, disputed that there has been a blurring of lines between diplomats and spies.

"Our diplomats are just that, diplomats," he said. "They represent our country around the world and engage openly and transparently with representatives of foreign governments and civil society. Through this process, they collect information that shapes our policies and actions. This is what diplomats, for our country and other countries, have done for hundreds of years."

Though U.S. diplomats are generally supportive of the United Nations staff, there have been past disclosures of U.S. intelligence gathering at the organization. In 2004, it was disclosed that the United States and Britain had recorded the conversations of then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Iran 'must be stopped': Arab leaders implored U.S. to attack, WikiLeaks disclosures show - 11/29 *Los Angeles Times / Borzou Daragahi and Paul Richter*

Leaders of oil-rich Arabian Peninsula monarchies who are publicly reluctant to criticize Iran have been beseeching the United States in private to attack the Islamic Republic and destroy its nuclear facilities, according to a series of classified diplomatic cables released by the WikiLeaks website.

The cables show that both Saudi King Abdullah and King Hamed ibn Isa Khalifa of Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. 5th Fleet, are among the Arab leaders who have lobbied the United States to strike Iran. According to one dispatch, a Saudi official reminded Americans that the king had repeatedly asked the U.S. to "cut off the head of the snake" before it was too late.

The cables were among more than 250,000 American diplomatic dispatches provided by WikiLeaks to five U.S. and European news outlets, which began reporting the contents on their websites Sunday. The cables offer U.S. officials' candid and sometimes unflattering analyses of foreign leaders and governments, which could strain relations with Arab and European states, Russia, China and other major players.

Among other disclosures, the cables reveal:

—U.S. officials believe North Korea has provided Iran with missiles that could allow it to strike European capitals and Moscow.

—U.S. diplomats have been assigned to gather a wide variety of information on foreign officials, including such details as credit card numbers. The United Nations secretary-general and his team have been among the special targets of this information gathering.

—The United States has carried on an unsuccessful effort to remove from a Pakistani research reactor enriched uranium U.S. officials fear could fall into the hands of militants.

—U.S. officials have been told by a Chinese source that the Chinese Politburo was behind the hacking of Google's computer system in China.

The cables are the third huge release of classified U.S. data by WikiLeaks. U.S. officials believe they were passed to WikiLeaks by a disgruntled Army private, Bradley Manning, who had access to classified computer networks as a junior intelligence analyst in Iraq. Manning is now in a military jail, but authorities believe he provided the classified data before he was arrested. WikiLeaks has been parceling it out at intervals.

The White House denounced the disclosures as "dangerous and reckless," warning that they could jeopardize the safety of foreign officials and others who have helped the United States, and would make it more difficult to conduct routine diplomacy. WikiLeaks released the documents in advance to the Guardian of Britain, Der Spiegel of Germany, Le Monde in France, El Pais in Spain and the New York Times.

U.S. officials have spent long hours in recent days notifying foreign governments that the cables would include sensitive material. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has personally called 11 capitals to try to soften the impact.

While the trove of cables did not contain startling revelations about Iran, they show that the Islamic Republic has been a preoccupation of the Obama administration and the Bush White House before it.

The documents illustrate how frightened the Arab world is of Iran's rising ambitions and its nuclear program — and how much Iran has become the center of attention in capitals around the world. At a June 2009 meeting with U.S. lawmakers, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak argued that attacking Iran any later than late 2010 "would result in unacceptable collateral damage."

Although Persian Gulf leaders recognize that the options for dealing with Iran are limited, the dispatches indicate that they repeatedly have urged U.S. military action, fearing that allowing Iran to build a nuclear bomb would shift the balance of power decisively in the region.

"That program must be stopped," one Nov. 4, 2009, cable quotes Khalifa as telling Gen. David H. Petraeus, then head of U.S. Central Command, which is responsible for U.S. military activity in the Middle East. "The danger of letting it go is greater than the danger of stopping it."

In a May 2005 meeting, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, deputy supreme commander of the armed forces of the United Arab Emirates, urged a U.S. general to use "ground forces" to take out Iran's nuclear program. Another cable noted that even though the military official was urging the U.S. to attack, the federation did not honor U.S. requests to interdict suspicious shipments transiting its shores to Iran. A February 2010 cable attributes Bin Zayed's "near obsessive" arms buildup to his fears about Iran.

"I believe this guy is going to take us to war," Bin Zayed told a U.S. delegation in April 2006 of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. "It's a matter of time. Personally I cannot risk it with a guy like Ahmadinejad. He is young and aggressive."

In December 2009, Bin Zayed told a U.S. official, "We know your priority is Al Qaeda, but don't forget Iran. Al Qaeda is not going to get a nuclear bomb."

During an April 2008 visit to Saudi Arabia, Petraeus and former U.S. envoy to Baghdad Ryan Crocker got an earful from the king and other officials about the need to confront Iran's nuclear program and its ambitions in Iraq. And during an April 2009 meeting, Saudi Prince Turki Kabeer warned American, Russian and Dutch diplomats that Riyadh could not stomach Iran's continued enrichment of uranium. "We are OK with nuclear electrical power and desalinization, but not with enrichment," he was quoted as saying.

Still, one Saudi diplomat urged Americans in 2008 to avoid war and launch talks. An Omani official asked Americans to take a more nuanced view of the Iranian issue and to question whether other Arab leaders' entreaties for war were based on logic or emotion.

Several documents showed the extent to which the U.S. has been desperately attempting to obtain detailed information on Iran's political scene and economy by interviewing sources at American diplomatic outposts in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Azerbaijan.

The U.S. has not had diplomatic relations with Iran for decades, and the documents show that Americans repeatedly have relied on European allies with embassies in Tehran to gain understanding of the Islamic Republic. According to one cable, former British envoy Geoffrey Adams advised Americans to be "steady and firm, tough but not aggressive" in late 2007 negotiations between Iranian and American officials over the security situation in Iraq.

"The current Iranian regime is effectively a fascist state and the time has come to decide on next steps," French diplomat Jean-David Levitte advised U.S. officials in September 2009.

The cables detail Iran's alleged breaches of law and protocol under Ahmadinejad and his hard-line entourage. A source at the U.S. Consulate in Dubai alleged that Iran used the Red Crescent Society to funnel weapons and militants into Iraq and Lebanon.

One cable quoted U.N. weapons inspectors as telling American officials in Vienna that Iran refused to hand over original design plans for an enrichment facility near the city of Qom. The cable quotes the U.N. officials as saying that during an inspection of the facility, Iranian technicians were "steered by unseen observers" who dispatched notes during meetings and insisted on recording all conversations.

WikiLeaks release reveals embarrassing diplomatic details – 11/28

McClatchy Newspapers / Jonathan S. Landay

WASHINGTON — The first batch of newly leaked U.S. diplomatic cables Sunday documented that the king of Saudi Arabia, echoed by other Arab leaders, have urged the United States to "cut off the head of the snake" and destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.

They also revealed a U.S. State Department instruction to U.S. diplomats to spy on United Nations officials — and collect their personal data, and they contained unflattering portraits of a number of world leaders.

Further releases in coming days will outline U.S. fears over the security of Pakistan's nuclear program, U.S. and South Korean discussions of Korean reunification and alleged Chinese cyber sabotage, according to the five media organizations given advance access to the materials.

The first tranche of documents, released by WikiLeaks, the whistle-blowing website, didn't contain any explosive revelations, although a cable outlining U.S. efforts to convince China to stop commercial air shipments of North Korean missile parts to Iran via Beijing appeared to divulge a top-secret U.S. intelligence operation.

However, the cables' blunt language and their unvarnished statements of U.S. positions on a wide range of issues as well as internal U.S. assessments of world leaders could prove highly embarrassing, hurt ties with allies and other countries and diminish trust in Washington's ability to safeguard secrets.

"These cables could compromise private discussions with foreign governments and opposition leaders," White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said in a statement. "When the substance of private conversations is printed on the front pages of newspapers across the world, it can deeply impact not only U.S. foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends."

"We condemn in the strongest terms the unauthorized disclosure of classified documents and sensitive national security information," he said.

One awkward leak was a January cable describing a meeting between Army Gen. David Petraeus, then head of U.S. Central Command, and President Ali Abdullah Saleh in which Saleh said he would cover up U.S. air strikes against local al Qaida members by continuing to say "the bombs are ours, not yours."

At that, Saleh's deputy prime minister joked that "he had just 'lied' by telling Parliament" that Yemeni forces had launched the strikes.

Richard Fontaine, a senior fellow with the Center for a New American Security and a past foreign policy adviser to Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said the release of the cables has the potential to be "a very big deal" not because of any one individual revelation so much as the overall chilling effect on U.S. diplomatic relations.

"I'm sure there are now tens of thousands of people who feel totally burned because they provided either their take or information to U.S. diplomats with the idea this was going to be protected," Fontaine said. "Now it's out there for the whole world to see."

As it did with earlier leaks of thousands of U.S. reports on military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, WikiLeaks provided more than 250,000 diplomatic cables in advance to the New York Times, Germany's Der Spiegel newsmagazine and the Guardian of Great Britain. It expanded the group to include Spanish newspaper El Pais and French newspaper Le Monde.

WikiLeaks is reported to have received the documents from a U.S. Army intelligence analyst who was based in Iraq and had access to SIPRNET, the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network — a Pentagon-run computer system that also carries State Department cable traffic classified up to secret. The system does not carry material rated top secret, the most highly classified level.

The analyst, Pfc. Bradley Manning, 22, was arrested earlier this year and charged with the unauthorized use and disclosure of U.S. classified information.

The cables released Sunday drive home the preoccupation by President Barack Obama and his predecessor, George W. Bush, with Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program, terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and the depth of international concern.

An April 20, 2008, cable recalled repeated entreaties by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for a U.S. attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, which are widely believed to be part of a secret nuclear weapons development program, an allegation denied by Tehran.

Abdullah frequently urged the U.S. "to cut off the head of the snake," said the cable, the summary of a meeting the king and other senior Saudi leaders held with then-U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and Petraeus.

At the same meeting, however, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal urged tighter U.S. and international sanctions on Iran, the course Obama adopted.

A November 2009 cable quoted King Hamad ibn Isa al Khalifa of Bahrain, the home of the U.S. 5th Fleet, as arguing "forcefully for taking action to terminate (Iran's) nuclear program by whatever means necessary." That same month, a cable reported a senior State Department official as telling his Israeli counterparts that U.S. diplomatic efforts to resolve the Iranian standoff weren't "open-ended."

Defense Secretary Robert Gates was quoted in a February cable as telling Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini that, "It will be a different world in five years' time" if Iran acquires a nuclear warhead.

"Without progress in the next few months, we risk nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, war prompted by an Israeli strike (on Iran's nuclear facilities), or both," Gates said.

The cables dealt with other alleged Iranian misconduct. They included a December 2008 warning by then-Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte to Armenia that it risked being hit with U.S. sanctions if it didn't stop selling arms to Tehran that were used by Iranian-backed militias to kill U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

One lengthy cable that could prove deeply embarrassing outlined new instructions to U.S. diplomats "around the world and at U.N. headquarters" on collecting intelligence on senior U.N. officials. The information included credit card numbers and frequent flyer miles, e-mail accounts and work schedules.

The State Department also wanted "detailed technical information, including passwords and personal encryption keys for communications networks used by U.N. officials. It also wanted to know about potential links between U.N. organizations and terrorists and any corruption in the U.N.," said the July 31, 2009, cable.

The Guardian said that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued the new intelligence-gathering instructions, and that the targets included U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the representatives of the permanent veto-wielding U.N. Security Council members — China, France, Russia, France and Britain.

The New York Times described the instructions as expanding the role of U.S. diplomats in collecting intelligence, a depiction disputed by State Department spokesman Phillip J. Crowley. "Our diplomats are just that, diplomats," Crowley said. "They . . . engage openly and transparently with representatives of foreign governments and civil society. Through this process, they collect information that shapes our policies and actions. This is what diplomats, from our country and other countries, have done for hundreds of years."

Other revelations:

U.S. officials expressed "shock at the rude behavior" of Britain's Prince Andrew when he was abroad.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi is always accompanied by a "voluptuous blonde Ukrainian nurse."

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has developed an "extraordinarily close relationship" with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, complete with gifts, "lucrative energy" contracts and the use of a "shadowy" Russian-speaking Italian as a go-between.

All parties broke law in Honduras coup, envoy wrote – 11/28

McClatchy Newspapers / Tim Johnson

MEXICO CITY — The events surrounding the June 2009 coup in Honduras was a carnival of illegal actions by every branch of government, including the successor of the deposed president, according to a diplomatic cable signed by the U.S. ambassador.

The cable, part of the quarter-million confidential diplomatic documents that WikiLeaks began to make public Sunday, offered a harsh critique of the ruling class in Honduras during and after the coup, the first in Latin America since the end of the Cold War.

In the cable, Ambassador Hugo Llorens, a veteran Cuban-American diplomat, wrote that he'd studied the legal and constitutional issues that led up to the June 28 morning when some 100 soldiers dragged President Manuel Zelaya out of bed and flew him to Costa Rica.

Llorens wrote that Zelaya's foes said he'd sought to alter constitutional articles considered "carved in stone" and had acted improperly in ousting the military chief. Llorens said, however, that the charges were never aired in a proper legal fashion.

"Although a case could well have been made against Zelaya for a number of the above alleged constitutional violations, there was never any formal, public weighing of the evidence nor any semblance of due process," said the cable, dated July 23, 2009.

Llorens wrote that the Honduran constitution appeared to give impeachment powers solely to the judiciary but that a trial was never conducted.

"Unfortunately, the President was never tried, or convicted, or was legally removed from office to allow a legal succession," the cable says.

The removal of Zelaya sent shock waves across Latin America, a region where democratic leaders were routinely deposed during the past century and where civil-military relations occasionally flare into open conflict.

In the cable, classified as "confidential," Llorens said "near unanimity" existed among the political class and institutions of state that Zelaya had abused the constitution, but added that his political adversaries were confused about how to proceed.

"Faced with that lack of clarity, the military and/or whoever ordered the coup fell back on what they knew — the way Honduran presidents were removed in the past: a bogus resignation letter and a one-way ticket to a neighboring country," the cable said.

Llorens noted that Zelaya's "forced removal by the military was clearly illegal, and (Speaker of Congress Roberto) Micheletti's ascendance as 'interim president' was totally illegitimate."

The cable said that "even the most zealous of coup defenders have been unable to make convincing arguments to bridge the intellectual gulf between 'Zelaya broke the law' to 'therefore, he was packed off to Costa Rica by the military without a trial.'"

Five months after the coup, Hondurans went to the voting booths and elected Porfirio Lobo as president, moving past the coup even as many of the legal issues remained unresolved.

Zelaya now lives in exile in the Dominican Republic.

Officials Assail WikiLeaks and Try to Curb Damage - 11/29

New York Times / Ginger Thompson

WASHINGTON -- As a trove of confidential State Department documents was disclosed Sunday, officials said they had already taken several steps to prevent a recurrence of such an extensive leak.

The measures were part of a broad effort by the Obama administration to reassure foreign governments and United States personnel around the world even as they began poring over the newly disclosed material.

In a statement, a Pentagon spokesman, Bryan Whitman, said the measures included limiting the offices and computers used to move classified material to unclassified systems, and establishing fraud detection monitors, similar to those currently used by credit card companies, to help detect unusual data access or usage.

He said the Pentagon had established "insider threat working groups" to identify security gaps that led to the WikiLeaks disclosures and had reviewed information security protocols.

"Bottom line," Mr. Whitman wrote, "it is now much more difficult for a determined actor to get access and move information outside authorized channels."

The documents are the latest in a series originally obtained by WikiLeaks, an organization devoted to exposing official secrets, allegedly from a disenchanted, low-level Army intelligence analyst who had exploited a security loophole in the military's computer network.

Efforts at damage control had begun days before news organizations posted their first articles about the documents on their Web sites.

The State Department spokesman, Philip J. Crowley, said, "Thus far, governments have reacted cautiously and constructively. They are doing what we are doing, trying to assess the impact of the release. But no one is happy about it. The risk to everyone has gone up."

A White House statement said, "We condemn in the strongest terms the unauthorized disclosure of classified documents and sensitive national security information."

Leading members of Congress echoed the administration. Some asked the administration to charge Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder, with espionage.

Representative Peter T. King of New York, a Republican likely to become the next chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, said the disclosure shows "Mr. Assange's purposeful intent to damage not only our national interests in fighting the war on terror, but also undermines the very safety of coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Mr. King also urged the State Department to designate WikiLeaks a terrorist organization.

Reactions had not yet begun to arrive from governments around the world. But in Pakistan, television news networks late Sunday night prominently highlighted a leaked cable that mentioned a damning assessment of President Asif Ali Zardari by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah. The networks hinted that a formal government response would be forthcoming.

In France, the United States ambassador, Charles H. Rivkin, said in a statement to the French newspaper Le Monde that the United States "profoundly regrets" the WikiLeaks disclosures.

"I am convinced that citizens of good will will recognize that the internal reports written by diplomats do not alone represent the official foreign policy of a nation," Mr. Rivkin wrote.

Britain's government sent word that it did not expect the disclosures to damage relations with Washington. "We have a very strong relationship with the United States," it said in a written statement from the British Foreign Office. "That will continue."

A senior German official said that while the government there would reserve final judgment on the documents, it did not expect the WikiLeaks disclosures to affect Germany's relations with Washington.

The official said that diplomats would be judged on their work, not on their leaked private communications.

The State Department cables represented the third cache of confidential United States documents to be released by WikiLeaks this year.

Documents released earlier included Pentagon incident-and-intelligence reports from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

WikiLeaks and its supporters have defended the disclosures, comparing them to the 1971 publication of the Pentagon Papers. On its Web site the organization has said, "Transparency in government activities leads to reduced corruption, better government and stronger democracies."

The White House said that the work of WikiLeaks ran counter to the cause of open government. And in the case of the State Department cables, the White House said, their disclosure compromises this country's private discussions with foreign governments and opposition leaders, particularly those who "live under repressive regimes and who are trying to create more open and free societies."

"By releasing stolen and classified documents," the statement added, "WikiLeaks has put at risk not only the cause of human rights, but also the lives and work of these individuals."

The WikiLeaks Web site was inaccessible for much of the day on Sunday, and officials there blamed the problems on what they called a cyberattack.

The Obama administration said the government had nothing to do with the Web site's apparent malfunction, pointing out that WikiLeaks had experienced technical problems before.

Around the World, Distress Over Iran – 11/28

New York Times / David E. Sanger, James Glanz and Jo Becker

In late May 2009, Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, used a visit from a Congressional delegation to send a pointed message to the new American president.

In a secret cable sent back to Washington, the American ambassador to Israel, James B. Cunningham, reported that Mr. Barak had argued that the world had 6 to 18 months "in which stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons might still be viable." After that, Mr. Barak said, "any military solution would result in unacceptable collateral damage."

There was little surprising in Mr. Barak's implicit threat that Israel might attack Iran's nuclear facilities. As a pressure tactic, Israeli officials have been setting such deadlines, and extending them, for years. But six months later it was an Arab leader, the king of Bahrain, who provides the base for the American Fifth Fleet, telling the Americans that the Iranian nuclear program "must be stopped," according to another cable. "The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it," he said.

His plea was shared by many of America's Arab allies, including the powerful King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who according to another cable repeatedly implored Washington to "cut off the head of the snake" while there was still time.

These warnings are part of a trove of diplomatic cables reaching back to the genesis of the Iranian nuclear standoff in which leaders from around the world offer their unvarnished opinions about how to negotiate with, threaten and perhaps force Iran's leaders to renounce their atomic ambitions.

The cables also contain a fresh American intelligence assessment of Iran's missile program. They reveal for the first time that the United States believes that Iran has obtained advanced missiles from North Korea that could let it strike at Western European capitals and Moscow and help it develop more formidable long-range ballistic missiles.

In day-by-day detail, the cables, obtained by WikiLeaks and made available to a number of news organizations, tell the disparate diplomatic back stories of two administrations pressed from all sides to confront Tehran. They show how President George W. Bush, hamstrung by the complexities of Iraq and suspicions that he might attack Iran, struggled to put together even modest sanctions.

They also offer new insights into how President Obama, determined to merge his promise of “engagement” with his vow to raise the pressure on the Iranians, assembled a coalition that agreed to impose an array of sanctions considerably harsher than any before attempted.

When Mr. Obama took office, many allies feared that his offers of engagement would make him appear weak to the Iranians. But the cables show how Mr. Obama’s aides quickly countered those worries by rolling out a plan to encircle Iran with economic sanctions and antimissile defenses. In essence, the administration expected its outreach to fail, but believed that it had to make a bona fide attempt in order to build support for tougher measures.

A Sense of Urgency

Feeding the administration’s urgency was the intelligence about Iran’s missile program. As it weighed the implications of those findings, the administration maneuvered to win Russian support for sanctions. It killed a Bush-era plan for a missile defense site in Poland — which Moscow’s leaders feared was directed at them, not Tehran — and replaced it with one floating closer to Iran’s coast. While the cables leave unclear whether there was an explicit quid pro quo, the move seems to have paid off.

There is also an American-inspired plan to get the Saudis to offer China a steady oil supply, to wean it from energy dependence on Iran. The Saudis agreed, and insisted on ironclad commitments from Beijing to join in sanctions against Tehran.

At the same time, the cables reveal how Iran’s ascent has unified Israel and many longtime Arab adversaries — notably the Saudis — in a common cause. Publicly, these Arab states held their tongues, for fear of a domestic uproar and the retributions of a powerful neighbor. Privately, they clamored for strong action — by someone else.

If they seemed obsessed with Iran, though, they also seemed deeply conflicted about how to deal with it — with diplomacy, covert action or force. In one typical cable, a senior Omani military officer is described as unable to decide what is worse: “a strike against Iran’s nuclear capability and the resulting turmoil it would cause in the Gulf, or inaction and having to live with a nuclear-capable Iran.”

Still, running beneath the cables is a belief among many leaders that unless the current government in Tehran falls, Iran will have a bomb sooner or later. And the Obama administration appears doubtful that a military strike would change that.

One of the final cables, on Feb. 12 of this year, recounts a lunch meeting in Paris between Hervé Morin, then the French defense minister, and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates. Mr. Morin raised the delicate topic of whether Israel could strike Iran without American support.

Mr. Gates responded “that he didn’t know if they would be successful, but that Israel could carry out the operation.”

Then he added a stark assessment: any strike “would only delay Iranian plans by one to three years, while unifying the Iranian people to be forever embittered against the attacker.”

In 2005, Iran abruptly abandoned an agreement with the Europeans and announced that it would resume uranium enrichment activities. As its program grew, beginning with a handful of centrifuges, so, too, did many Arab states’ fears of an Iranian bomb and exasperation over American inability to block Tehran’s progress.

To some extent, this Arab obsession with Iran was rooted in the uneasy sectarian division of the Muslim world, between the Shiites who rule Iran, and the Sunnis, who dominate most of the region. Those strains had been drawn tauter with the invasion of Iraq, which effectively transferred control of the government there from Sunni to Shiite leaders, many close to Iran.

In December 2005, the Saudi king expressed his anger that the Bush administration had ignored his advice against going to war. According to a cable from the American Embassy in Riyadh, the king argued “that whereas in the past the U.S.,

Saudi Arabia and Saddam Hussein had agreed on the need to contain Iran, U.S. policy had now given Iraq to Iran as a 'gift on a golden platter.' ”

Regional distrust had only deepened with the election that year of a hard-line Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

During a meeting on Dec. 27, 2005, with the commander of the United States Central Command, Gen. John P. Abizaid, military leaders from the United Arab Emirates “all agreed with Abizaid that Iran’s new President Ahmadinejad seemed unbalanced, crazy even,” one cable reports. A few months later, the Emirates’ defense chief, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi, told General Abizaid that the United States needed to take action against Iran “this year or next.”

The question was what kind of action.

Previously, the crown prince had relayed the Emirates’ fear that “it was only a matter of time before Israel or the U.S. would strike Iranian nuclear facility targets.” That could provoke an outcome that the Emirates’ leadership considered “catastrophic”: Iranian missile strikes on American military installations in nearby countries like the Emirates.

Now, with Iran boasting in the spring of 2006 that it had successfully accomplished low-level uranium enrichment, the crown prince began to argue less equivocally, cables show. He stressed “that he wasn’t suggesting that the first option was ‘bombing’ Iran,” but also warned, “They have to be dealt with before they do something tragic.”

The Saudis, too, increased the pressure. In an April 2008 meeting with Gen. David H. Petraeus, then the incoming Central Command chief, the Saudi ambassador to Washington recalled the king’s “frequent exhortations to the U.S. to attack Iran,” and the foreign minister said that while he preferred economic pressure, the “use of military pressure against Iran should not be ruled out.”

Yet if the Persian Gulf allies were frustrated by American inaction, American officials were equally frustrated by the Arabs’ unwillingness to speak out against Iran. “We need our friends to say that they stand with the Americans,” General Abizaid told Emirates officials, according to one cable.

By the time Mr. Bush left office in January 2009, Iran had installed 8,000 centrifuges (though only half were running) and was enriching uranium at a rate that, with further processing, would let it produce a bomb’s worth of fuel a year. With that progress came increased Israeli pressure.

After the Israeli defense minister issued his ultimatum in May 2009, the chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, followed up in November.

“There is still time for diplomacy, but we should not forget that Iran’s centrifuges are working day and night,” he told a delegation led by Representative Ike Skelton, the Democratic chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

That, in turn, led Arab leaders to press even more forcefully for the United States to act — before Israel did. Crown Prince bin Zayed, predicting in July 2009 that an Israeli attack could come by year’s end, suggested the danger of appeasing Iran. “Ahmadinejad is Hitler,” he declared.

Seemingly taken aback, a State Department official replied, “We do not anticipate military confrontation with Iran before the end of 2009.”

So it was that the United States had put together a largely silent front of Arab states whose positions on sanctions and a potential attack looked much like Israel’s.

Banks and Businesses

Despite an American trade embargo and several rounds of United Nations sanctions, the Bush administration had never forged the global coalition needed to impose truly painful international penalties on Iran. While France and Britain were supportive, countries like Germany, Russia and China that traded extensively with Iran were reluctant, at best.

In the breach, the United States embarked on a campaign to convince foreign banks and companies that it was in their interest to stop doing business with Iran, by demonstrating how Tehran used its banks, ships, planes and front companies to evade existing sanctions and feed its nuclear and missile programs.

The cables show some notable moments of success, particularly with the banks. But they also make it clear that stopping Iran from obtaining needed technology was a maddening endeavor, with spies and money-laundering experts chasing shipments and transactions in whack-a-mole fashion, often to be stymied by recalcitrant foreign diplomats.

One cable details how the United States asked the Italians to stop the planned export to Iran of 12 fast boats, which could attack American warships in the gulf. Italy did so only after months of “foot-dragging, during which the initial eleven boats were shipped,” the embassy in Rome reported.

Another cable recounts China’s repeated refusal to act on detailed information about shipments of missile parts from North Korea to Beijing, where they were loaded aboard Iran Air flights to Tehran.

The election of Mr. Obama, at least initially, left some countries wondering whether the sanctions push was about to end. Shortly after taking office, in a videotaped message timed to the Persian New Year, he reiterated his campaign offer of a “new beginning” — the first sustained talks in three decades with Tehran.

The United Arab Emirates called Mr. Obama’s message “confusing.” The American Embassy in Saudi Arabia reported that the talk about engaging Iran had “fueled Saudi fears that a new U.S. administration might strike a ‘grand bargain’ without prior consultations.”

In Europe, Germany and others discerned an effort to grab market share. “According to the British, other EU Member states fear the U.S. is preparing to take commercial advantage of a new relationship with Iran and subsequently are slowing the EU sanctions process,” the American Embassy in London reported.

The administration, though, had a different strategy in mind.

The man chosen to begin wiping out the confusion was Daniel Glaser, a little-known official with a title that took two breaths to enunciate in full: acting assistant secretary of the Treasury for terrorist financing and financial crimes.

The first big rollout of his message appears to have come in Brussels on March 2 and 3, 2009, during what the cables called “an unprecedented classified briefing” to more than 70 Middle East experts from European governments.

Mr. Glaser got right to the point. Yes, engagement was part of the administration’s overall strategy. “However, ‘engagement’ alone is unlikely to succeed,” Mr. Glaser said. And to those concerned that the offer of reconciliation was open-ended, one cable said, he replied curtly that “time was not on our side.”

The relief among countries supporting sanctions was palpable enough to pierce the cables’ smooth diplomatese. “Iran needs to fear the stick and feel a light ‘tap’ now,” said Robert Cooper, a senior European Union official.

“Glaser agreed, noting the stick could escalate beyond financial measures under a worst case scenario,” a cable said.

The Czechs were identified as surprisingly enthusiastic behind-the-scenes allies. Another section of the same cable was titled “Single Out but Understand the E.U. Foot-Draggers”: Sweden, considered something of a ringleader, followed by Cyprus, Greece, Luxembourg, Spain, Austria, Portugal and Romania.

The decoding of Mr. Obama’s plan was apparently all the Europeans needed, and by year’s end, even Germany, with its suspicions and longstanding trading ties with Iran, appeared to be on board.

China’s Concerns

Still, there could be little meaningful action without Russia and China. Both are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, where multilateral action would have to pass, and both possess a global reach that could effectively scuttle much of what the United States tried on its own.

The cables indicate that the administration undertook multilayered diplomatic moves to help ensure that neither would cast a Council veto to protect Iran.

As of early 2010, China imported nearly 12 percent of its oil from Iran and worried that supporting sanctions would imperil that supply. Obama administration officials have previously said that the year before, a senior adviser on Iran, Dennis B. Ross, traveled to Saudi Arabia to seek a guarantee that it would supply the lost oil if China were cut off.

The cables show that Mr. Ross had indeed been in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, in April 2009. While there is no direct account of those meetings, a suggestion of dazzling success turns up later, in cables describing meetings between Saudi and Chinese officials.

The offer may have come during a Jan. 13 meeting in Riyadh between Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi of China and King Abdullah and other senior Saudi officials, one of whom told Mr. Yang, “Saudi Arabia understood China was concerned about having access to energy supplies, which could be cut off by Iran,” according to one cable.

The conversation, evidently shaped by Mr. Ross’s request, developed from there, the cable indicated. A later cable noted simply, “Saudi Arabia has told the Chinese that it is willing to effectively trade a guaranteed oil supply in return for Chinese pressure on Iran not to develop nuclear weapons.”

That left Russia.

Dealing With Russia

Throughout 2009, the cables show, the Russians vehemently objected to American plans for a ballistic missile defense site in Poland and the Czech Republic. Conceived under President Bush and billed as a shield against long-range Iranian missiles that American intelligence said were under development, the site was an irritant to Russia, which contended that it was really designed to shoot down Russian missiles.

In talks with the United States, the Russians insisted that there would be no cooperation on other issues until the Eastern Europe site was scrapped. Those demands crested on July 29, when a senior Russian official repeatedly disrupted a meeting with Russia’s objections, according to one cable.

Six weeks later, Mr. Obama gave the Russians what they wanted: he abruptly replaced the Eastern Europe site with a ship-borne system. That system, at least in its present form, is engineered to protect specific areas against short- and medium-range missiles, not pulverize long-range missiles soaring above the atmosphere. Mr. Obama explained the shift by saying that intelligence assessments had changed, and that the long-range missile threat appeared to be growing more slowly than previously thought.

The cables are silent on whether at some higher level, Russia hinted that Security Council action against Iran would be easier with the site gone. But another secret meeting with the Russians last December, recounted in the cables, may help explain why Mr. Obama was willing to shift focus to the short- and medium-range threat, at least in the near term.

In the meeting, American officials said nothing about a slowing of the long-range threat, as cited by Mr. Obama. In fact, they insisted that North Korea had sent Iran 19 advanced missiles, based on a Russian design, that could clear a path toward the development of long-range missiles. According to unclassified estimates of their range, though, they would also immediately allow Iran to strike Western Europe or easily reach Moscow — essentially the threat the revamped system was designed for.

Russia is deeply skeptical that Iran has obtained the advanced missiles, or that their North Korean version, called the BM-25, even exists. "For Russia, the BM-25 is a mysterious missile," a Russian official said. (That argument was dealt a blow last month, when North Korea rolled out what some experts identified as those very missiles in a military parade.)

Whatever the dynamic, Mr. Obama had removed the burr under the Russians' saddle, and in January 2010, one cable reported, a senior Russian official "indicated Russia's willingness to move to the pressure track."

The cables obtained by WikiLeaks end in February 2010, before the last-minute maneuvering that led to a fourth round of Security Council sanctions and even stiffer measures — imposed by the United States, the Europeans, Australia and Japan — that experts say are beginning to pinch Iran's economy. But while Mr. Ahmadinejad has recently offered to resume nuclear negotiations, the cables underscore the extent to which Iran's true intentions remain a mystery.

As Crown Prince bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi put it in one cable: "Any culture that is patient and focused enough to spend years working on a single carpet is capable of waiting years and even decades to achieve even greater goals." His greatest worry, he said, "is not how much we know about Iran, but how much we don't."

WikiLeaks Release Reveals Ugly Side Of Diplomacy - 11/28

NPR.com / Dina Temple-Raston

WikiLeaks, an organization devoted to revealing secret documents, has made good on its promise to release a huge cache of confidential American diplomatic cables. The documents dump, which includes a huge sampling of the daily traffic between the U.S. State Department and some 270 embassies and consulates, pulls back the curtain on the sometimes messy business of diplomacy.

"By its very nature, field reporting to Washington is candid and often incomplete information," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said in a statement Sunday. "It is not an expression of policy, nor does it always shape final policy decisions. Nevertheless, these cables could compromise private discussions ... and when the substance of private conversations is printed on the front pages of newspapers across the world, it can deeply impact not only U.S. foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends around the world."

WikiLeaks, in addition to making the cables available online, used an intermediary to provide them early to The New York Times, the German magazine Der Spiegel and Britain's Guardian newspaper weeks ago for release Sunday. The WikiLeaks website appears to have been intermittently shut down Sunday.

A Generation Of American Diplomacy

Taken together, the quarter-million documents released Sunday span more than a generation of American diplomacy. Dating as far back as 1966 to the latest cable written as recently as this past February, the documents outline, among other things, a standoff over nuclear fuel transfers between the U.S. and Pakistan in 2007; a scenario for a reunited Korea should the North Korean government fall; and round-the-clock efforts on the part of the Obama administration to rein in Iran's nuclear program and Iran's effort to dominate the Middle East — all issues on the front burner of U.S. foreign policy today.

On the subject of Iran, the cables track Washington's view of Iran's three-pronged strategy to emerge as the most powerful force in the Middle East. Diplomats assume that Iran is developing a nuclear weapons capability and missile systems; that it wants regional hegemony across the Middle East; and that the leadership there represented a growing danger to Israel.

The cables also make clear that without an embassy in Tehran and very limited American presence inside the country, the U.S. has a dearth of first-hand intelligence of what is going on there, the news organizations who saw the cables reported.

According to one cable, William Burns, U.S. undersecretary of state, finds a sympathetic hearing about Iran in a less expected quarter when he visits Baku, the capital of one of Iran's closest neighbors, Azerbaijan, in February 2010.

According to a confidential account of a meeting with President Ilham Aliyev, the Azerbaijan president tells Burns "that although the visible side of Azerbaijan's relations with Iran appears normal", the substance was very different. "I do not exclude that relations will become more difficult," he added. Aliyev tells Burns that Tehran was "financing radical Islamic groups and Hezbollah terrorists." Aliyev also said, according to the cable, that the situation was "very tense within Iran and believed it could erupt at any time."

Recent Cables

The cables also detail recent meetings with the Yemeni president after U.S. strikes in his country against alleged terrorists. President Ali Abdullah Saleh says that he will tell the Yemeni parliament that the bombs that fell were Yemeni, not American ones. He jokes about smuggling in his country and says that he's concerned about drugs and weapons, but doesn't object to "good whiskey" being smuggled in. He's the ruler of a conservative Muslim country.

The released cables also talk about Afghan President Hamid Karzai's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai. American officials met with him in late 2009 and early 2010. U.S. diplomats made clear in their cables that they don't trust him. In the middle of a cable back to Washington, they put in the following: "Note: While we must deal with AWK as the head of the Provincial Council, he is widely understood to be corrupt and a narcotics trafficker."

Another cable reads: Mr. Karzai "demonstrated that he will dissemble when it suits his needs." It says he clearly did not appear to "understand the level of our knowledge of his activities. We will need to monitor his activity closely, and deliver a recurring, transparent message to him about the limits of American tolerance."

The concern is if he didn't know the level of American surveillance before, he knows it now — thanks to the release of these dispatches.

Unflattering Comments

Even the less sensitive areas outlined in the cables will have the State Department scrambling to make amends to leaders who were never supposed to hear the unvarnished comments passed between American diplomats.

The German chancellor is referred to as Angela "Teflon" Merkel. Karzai is said to be "driven by paranoia." North Korean leader Kim Jong Il is said to suffer from epilepsy. Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's full-time nurse is called a "hot blond." That's part of the reason why Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and top State Department officials around the world have been on the phones calling foreign leaders to prepare them for the disclosures.

On Sunday, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman condemned the "reckless disclosure" of the documents. In a statement, he outlined steps the Defense Department has taken to prevent further leaks, including changing the way classified material is moved to unclassified systems.

Just how WikiLeaks got these cables and two other caches of secret U.S. documents is still a matter of debate. The belief is that an Army intelligence analyst named Bradley Manning may have been behind the leak. He allegedly told a computer hacker named Adrian Lamo that he had downloaded the documents and delivered them to WikiLeaks. Lamo reported Manning to federal authorities, and Manning has been charged with illegally leaking classified information. He faces a possible court-martial and, if convicted, a lengthy prison term.

WikiLeaks reveals U.S. diplomatic secrets - 11/28

Politico | Glenn Thrush and Gordon Lubold and Laura Rozen

WikiLeaks has dropped its bombshell cache of U.S. diplomatic cables, ripping the cloak off scores of secret deals and duds, including clandestine North Korean support for Iran and the Bush administration's failed attempt to remove nuclear material from Pakistan.

The release — more than a quarter-million back-channel cables that include brutally candid assessments of world leaders and previously undisclosed details of nuclear and antiterrorism activity — represents the most embarrassing and potentially damaging disclosure of American diplomatic material in decades.

“I don’t see the world ending ... but lots of red, sputtering faces in D.C., embassies and capitals,” a senior American diplomat told POLITICO early Sunday, just before the release of the documents, which chronicle the sprawling growth of the U.S. diplomatic and intelligence corps after the 2001 terrorist attacks.

The diplomat also predicted that governments and individuals overseas are likely to clam up as a result of the disclosures, “since no one will trust us to keep a secret for a while,” while “various and sundry interest groups will cherry-pick whatever can be found in the documents to support whatever version of reality they are peddling.”

For weeks, the Obama administration had been pressuring WikiLeaks, and its controversial founder, Julian Assange, to withhold publication of the documents, arguing that their publication could compromise the lives of U.S. service members and officials.

Assange, whose website came under cyberattack Sunday, refused to comply — even ignoring an 11th-hour plea from the State Department’s legal adviser, who said publication of the documents was illegal and could undermine national security.

But they are also deeply embarrassing, providing off-the-cuff assessments by American diplomats of world leaders, critiques that were expected to be released only decades from now. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is compared to Hitler, French President Nicolas Sarkozy is called an “emperor with no clothes,” Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai is “driven by paranoia,” according to the cables, while German Chancellor Angela Merkel earns high marks as a “Teflon” politician.

Perversely, the sheer size of the dump — a mountain of gossip, intrigue, high-stakes policy and lowbrow humor — may ensure that some damaging revelations that might have been front-page stories if leaked one by one get lost in the shuffle.

The long-expected release of the documents — scheduled to be published simultaneously at around 4:30 p.m. EST by The New York Times, Germany’s Der Spiegel, Spain’s El Pais, France’s Le Monde and Britain’s Guardian — was accelerated by a few hours after a German Twitter user obtained an early copy of Der Spiegel and began posting tidbits online. (Subsequently, it was reported by Michael Calderone at The Cutline that the New York Times got its documents from The Guardian this time.)

The two previous releases of documents by WikiLeaks produced front-page stories — the recently disclosed Iraq war logs indicated that previous American estimates of the total number of Iraqi casualties were lower than the actual number — but overall, they contained few surprising details.

The batch released Sunday, however, included vivid details about current operations and the sausage factory behind foreign policy, delivered by officials in 270 overseas posts worldwide over the past three years. The massive leak reportedly came from a service member with access to the documents.

Some of the material was so explosive that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spent much of the past week preparing foreign leaders for the fallout — what the Guardian described as a “meltdown” of the U.S. diplomatic corps.

Saudi King Abdullah frequently pressed the U.S. to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities “to cut off the head of the snake,” the Saudi ambassador to Washington, Adel al-Jubeir, said, according to a report on Abdullah’s meeting with Gen. David Petraeus, the senior U.S. commander in the Middle East, in April 2008.

One especially damaging revelation — previously unknown — details a conversation between Petraeus and the president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in which Saleh offers to claim U.S. airstrikes on suspected Al Qaeda militants were actually conducted by his forces.

That prompted Yemen's deputy prime minister to "joke that he had just 'lied' by telling Parliament" that Yemeni forces had been behind the strikes.

In another cable, a U.S. diplomat ruefully reports that an Afghan vice president carried \$52 million in cash with him during a trip to the United Arab Emirates last year, without disclosing its origin or destination.

Yet another describes a State Department effort to coax Slovenia to accept a Guantanamo Bay detainee. In exchange, top Slovenian officials were apparently offered a face-to-face meeting with President Obama.

In a statement soon after The New York Times published major excerpts on its website, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs "condemn[ed] in the strongest terms" the release of the documents to the Times, Germany's Der Spiegel and the Times of London — which followed the pattern of previous WikiLeaks document dumps of secret Iraq and Afghanistan war documents.

"By its very nature, field reporting to Washington is candid and often incomplete information," wrote Gibbs. "It is not an expression of policy, nor does it always shape final policy decisions. Nevertheless, these cables could compromise private discussions with foreign governments and opposition leaders, and when the substance of private conversations is printed on the front pages of newspapers across the world, it can deeply impact not only U.S. foreign policy interests but those of our allies and friends around the world."

"Cable traffic is inherently more sensitive than spot reporting," said Rick "Ozzie" Nelson, a former naval officer who worked at the National Security Council. "This is a little bit more subjective analysis," he told POLITICO. The cables reveal the kinds of private dialogues that any nation has to have with itself, he said.

"This releasing of these sensitive cables does a disservice not only to us but our allies globally. Our government needs to be able to operate and have an open dialogue."

Nelson, now a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that if the release of data was aimed at revealing a particularly egregious wrong the government had done, he could see its justification. In this case, he said, it was just a dump of thousands of documents with no apparent purpose but to embarrass the U.S. government.

Among the other significant revelations:

— North Korea, currently embroiled in a knife's edge confrontation with South Korea and the U.S., was able to smuggle 19 advanced, Russian-designed missiles, capable of delivering nuclear payloads, to Iran, according to a Feb. 24, 2010, cable detailing a meeting between Russian officials and a State Department nonproliferation expert. The shipment of some R-27 components was widely known in intelligence circles, but the WikiLeaks disclosures represent the first confirmation that Iran now possess complete missile systems.

— In May 2009, Anne Patterson, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, reported that Pakistani officials were blocking an American attempt to remove fissile material from a reactor in the country for fear the effort would be leaked to the local press.

— A Chinese contact tipped off the U.S. Embassy in Beijing that China's Politburo OK'd a huge effort to hack into and eavesdrop on Google computers as part of a nearly decade-long cyber-sabotage effort aimed at American companies and supporters of the Dalai Lama.

— In 2007, U.S. officials warned Germany not to arrest CIA officials involved in the bungled rendition of an innocent German citizen who shared the same name as a wanted terror suspect.

— American diplomats in Rome reported on the close and odd friendship developing between Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Italy's colorful billionaire leader, Silvio Berlusconi. A 2009 cable alleged the pair shared "lavish gifts," valuable energy contracts. The cable also alleged that Putin wasn't quite the strongman portrayed in the West —

painting a picture of an autocratic leader with little hold over the huge, and largely unaccountable, post-Soviet bureaucracy.

The New York Times defended its decision to go forward with its story despite White House objections, noting that few of the documents were labeled "top secret" and passages that would have endangered individuals were redacted.

Of the candid cables themselves, the Times editors wrote, "We are less likely to censor candid remarks simply because they might cause a diplomatic controversy or embarrass officials."

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman described the release as "the theft of huge amounts of classified data."

He said that the leak was an unfortunate byproduct of "efforts to give diplomatic, military, law enforcement and intelligence specialists quicker and easier access to greater amounts of data," and the "unintended consequences" are to make "sensitive data more vulnerable to compromise."

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story identified The Times of London as one of the recipients of the documents instead of the Guardian.

Iran a focal point of documents – 11/28

Politico / Laura Rozen

Sensitive diplomatic discussions on how to deal with Iran's nuclear program are among the more-than-250,000 classified U.S. diplomatic cables news organizations obtained from WikiLeaks and reported on Sunday.

But while there are some surprises in the raw cables reviewed so far — U.S. anger at Armenia's alleged weapons transfers to Iran that were implicated in the killing of U.S. forces in Iraq; the Saudi king allegedly urging the United States to deal with Iran militarily - one is struck overall that the classified diplomatic discussions on Iran revealed in the cables are not all that different from what one would expect from following the public comments senior U.S. officials have made on the Iran issue the last several months.

In a February 2010 meeting with Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, for instance, Defense Secretary Bob Gates "emphasized that a [U.N. Security Council] resolution was important because it would give the European Union and nations a legal platform on which to impose even harsher sanctions against Iran," a Feb. 8, 2010 Secret/No Foreign cable written by Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow relayed.

"SecDef pointedly warned that urgent action is required," the cable continued. "Without progress in the next few months, we risk nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, war prompted by an Israeli strike, or both. SecDef predicted 'a different world' in 4-5 years if Iran developed nuclear weapons."

While the cable offers an insider's notes on the meeting, its account of Gates' message to the Italian foreign minister is hardly different from what Gates has said publicly on the issue at many points.

In contrast, some of the cables reported on by the Guardian on Sunday suggest the U.S. has come under more concerted Arab pressure behind closed doors, including from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, to deal with Iran militarily than public statements would suggest.

Saudi King Abdullah has "frequently exhorted the U.S. to attack Iran to put an end to its nuclear weapons programme," the Guardian cited one U.S. cable.

"He told you [Americans] to cut off the head of the snake," said Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi ambassador to Washington, according to a report on Abdullah's meeting with Gen. David Petraeus in April 2008.

While senior Saudi Arabian officials have publicly expressed skepticism that international sanctions would be sufficient to curtail Iran's nuclear program and its alleged efforts to destabilize regional states, they have mostly refrained from

publicly calling for military action against Iran — although such views have been described as having been privately expressed to senior American officials by the Saudis and other Arab states, Washington Iran watchers have said.

"Sanctions are a long-term solution" for Iran's nuclear program, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal said in a joint news conference with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Riyadh in February 2010. "But we see the issue in the shorter term."

The cables also report in detail on U.S. diplomatic consultations with Turkey, including over its relations with Iran, Syria, and Israel.

William Burns, the U.S. under-secretary of State for Political Affairs, "strongly urged [Turkish Foreign Ministry Under Secretary Feridun] Sinirlioglu to support action to convince the Iranian government it is on the wrong course," according to a February 2010 cable written by then U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Jim Jeffrey.

"Burns acknowledged Turkey's exposure to the economic effects of sanctions as a neighbor to Iran, but reminded Sinirlioglu Turkish interests would suffer if Israel were to act militarily to forestall Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons or if Egypt and Saudi Arabia were to seek nuclear arsenals of their own," the Jeffrey cable continued. "'We'll keep the door open to engagement,' [Burns] stressed. A visibly disheartened Sinirlioglu conceded a unified message is important. He acknowledged the countries of the region perceive Iran as a growing threat: 'Alarm bells are ringing even in Damascus.'"

A 2008 cable – transmitting a letter from then-Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte to senior Armenian officials -- reveals that the United States was furious at Armenia for allegedly transferring arms to Iran that the U.S. said were used in attacks that killed U.S. forces in Iraq.

"Secretary [of State Condoleezza] Rice, Assistant Secretary [Daniel] Fried, Deputy Assistant Secretary [Mathew] Bryza, and Ambassador Yovanovitch have raised with you our deep concerns about Armenia's transfer of arms to Iran which resulted in the death and injury of U.S. soldiers in Iraq," Negroponte warned. "Notwithstanding the close relationship between our countries, neither the Administration nor the U.S. Congress can overlook this case. ... If sanctions are imposed, penalties could include the cutoff of U.S. assistance and certain export restrictions."

The New York Times, England's The Guardian, Spain's El Pais, France's Le Monde and Germany's Der Spiegel were the news organizations that - either directly or indirectly - got an advanced look at the cache of U.S. diplomatic correspondence, that includes State and Defense Department communications with some 270 embassies and consulates dating back to 2008.

The State Department's top legal adviser, Harold Koh, condemned the leak in a letter to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Saturday, saying the exposure of the cables threatens the lives of innocent individuals, including journalists, human rights workers, and soldiers.

The Defense Department also warned Sunday that the latest WikiLeaks exposure threatens the inter-agency communication the United States has tried to increase in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

"The 9/11 attacks and their aftermath revealed gaps in intra-governmental information sharing," Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said in a statement to reporters Sunday. "Departments and agencies have taken significant steps to reduce those obstacles, and the work that has been done to date has resulted in considerable improvement in information-sharing and increased cooperation across government operations."

"However, as we have now seen with the theft of huge amounts of classified data and the WikiLeaks compromises, these efforts to give diplomatic, military, law enforcement and intelligence specialists quicker and easier access to greater amounts of data have had unintended consequences – making our sensitive data more vulnerable to compromise," Whitman said.

Pentagon tightens info controls – 11/28*Politico | Gordon Lubold*

The Pentagon on Sunday announced new approaches for how it would safeguard information in the wake of the leak of documents from WikiLeaks, amid allegations that the Obama administration went too far in improving information-sharing across the government.

The Defense Department's new initiatives, which include both short- and long-term solutions, aim to prevent the potential for another theft of classified information. For example, officials said they were disabling all "write" capability to removable media such as thumb drives or disks, on DoD classified computers, "as a temporary technical solution to mitigate the future risks of personnel moving classified data to unclassified systems."

The department will also limit the number of computer systems authorized to move data from a classified system to an unclassified one, according to an outline of the new rules the Pentagon released Sunday. And the department is developing procedures "to monitor and detect suspicious, unusual or anomalous user behavior" that is akin to the ways credit card companies watch card user behavior to spot fraud. The initiatives follow two reviews directed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates in August that stemmed from the first WikiLeaks leak over the summer.

"The bottom line," said Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman of the new measures, is "it is now much more difficult for a determined actor to get access to and move information outside of authorized channels."

The WikiLeaks debacle is forcing the Pentagon to refine measures that were put in place after 9/11 to encourage more information-sharing. The 9/11 Commission directed that the government work harder to share information across the bureaucracy – not "stovepipe" or compartmentalize it.

"The security concerns need to be weighed against the costs," the 9/11 Commission report said. "There is no punishment for not sharing information. Agencies uphold a 'need-to-know' culture of information protection rather than promoting a 'need-to-share' culture of integration."

Whitman acknowledged that it was important to strike a proper balance.

"As we have now seen with the theft of huge amounts of classified data and the WikiLeaks compromises, these efforts to give diplomatic, military, law enforcement and intelligence specialists quicker and easier access to greater amounts of data have had unintended consequences – making our sensitive data more vulnerable to compromise."

But the administration is already being criticized for allowing the leak in the first place. A Republican lawmaker Sunday said the WikiLeaks release was a failure of the administration to safeguard information that was critical to diplomatic relations and national security. Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.), who sits on the House Intelligence Committee, said that in the post 9/11 push to "connect the dots" and expand information-sharing between agencies – the administration went too far.

"What we did is we created an environment that enabled this stuff to be stolen by putting it all in one place," Hoekstra told POLITICO. "You have to ask yourself a question, why would a private first class, sitting in Baghdad, have access to this kind of information?"

Government officials believe that PFC Bradley Manning is the main culprit behind the leaking of information to WikiLeaks. He was charged in June in connection with another leak.

Hoekstra said the disclosure of the documents is an embarrassment to the administration and represents a "critical failure by the Pentagon and intelligence community" to protect sensitive information. He called for hearings to determine what happened.

WikiLeaks, Secret Cables and the Downside of America's Security Mania – 11/28*Politics Daily | Walter Shapiro*

The embarrassing release of more than a quarter million confidential U.S. diplomatic cables Sunday by WikiLeaks is certain to spawn a hand-wringing national debate over why America cannot keep its secrets. Inevitably there will be strident calls for draconian new laws, more exhaustive security procedures and more invasive background investigations into the staggering 3 million Americans with security clearances.

That is the American way dating back to the earliest days of the Cold War – respond to every security breach with a new slam-the-barn-door crackdown. But this bureaucratic reflex obscures the larger truth that for decades America has been unable to tell the difference between real secrets (nuclear codes, the names of Iranian spies, war plans on how to respond to a North Korean military offensive) and routine memos stamped "secret."

Among the 11,000 "secret" cables included in the WikiLeaks document dump is a memorable September 2009 character assessment of Muammar Qaddafi by Gene Cretz, the U.S. ambassador to Libya. Qaddafi, according to the cable, will not travel without his favorite "voluptuous blonde" Ukrainian nurse because she alone "knows his routine." In fact, Cretz reports, "some embassy contacts claim" that (warning: shocking revelation ahead) Qaddafi and his 38-year-old Ukrainian caregiver have a "romantic relationship." The memo to the State Department goes on to conclude that Qaddafi is "a complicated individual who has managed to stay in power for 40 years through a skillful balancing of interests and realpolitik methods."

Sprinkled with details about Qaddafi's apparent interest in dance troupes and horse racing, cable reads like a competent newspaper profile written by a visiting foreign correspondent after a week of picking up the diplomatic gossip in Tripoli. The difference is that rather than immediately appearing in the Economist or The Washington Post, the Cretz cable was supposed to remain secret until 2019 when it would be reviewed for declassification. If Qaddafi is still alive in 2019 or any of his heirs hold power in Libya, the odds are prodigiously high that the cable would again be stamped "secret" until 2029 or 2039.

Obviously, there are serious complications for American diplomacy from the unauthorized release of documents like the 2009 conversation between King Hamad of Bahrain and Gen. David Petraeus about possible military strikes against the Iranian nuclear program. No national leader – especially not an Arab monarch – wants his private conversations with the U.S. military emblazoned across the world's front pages. That is why a chagrined Secretary of State Hillary Clinton may be contemplating a new book, "It Takes a Village to Plug a Leak."

For all the blustery denunciations of the security breach (John Kerry, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called it "a reckless action which jeopardizes lives"), this is not the Pentagon Papers revisited. Blaming The New York Times for coordinating the release (and redacting documents) with WikiLeaks is ludicrous since the same material was provided to foreign publications such as The Guardian in Britain and Der Spiegel in Germany.

Short of Chinese-style totalitarian measures like blocking Google searches, any American could access the documents once they hit the web anywhere in the world. The humiliation for U.S. diplomacy comes from the document dump itself – and not from the ability of American voters to learn that the Afghan vice president arrived in the United Arab Emirates with \$52 million in cash. (Presumably the Afghan official, Ahmed Massoud, does not qualify for an American Express card).

A lasting casualty from the State Department security breach is the hallowed tradition of the eloquent cable to Washington from an astute political officer in, say, Jakarta who can convey the Indonesian mood with deft details and dazzling analysis. Every diplomat wants to be a modern-day George Kennan who defined the contours of American Cold War policy with his famous Long Telegram from Moscow in 1946. But such bravura breakthroughs are impossible in a world defined by instantaneous communication. As Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins shrewdly wrote Sunday: "What this saga must do is to alter the basis of diplomatic reporting. If WikiLeaks can gain access, by whatever means, so presumably can a foreign power."

All this brings to mind the enduring wisdom of the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the last intellectual to serve in the Senate (four terms from New York) and the only public official to serve in the Cabinet or sub-Cabinet of four successive administrations (from JFK to Jerry Ford). Moynihan, who was U.N. ambassador and envoy to India, was long obsessed with the folly of excessive government secrecy. As Moynihan put it in a 1990 memorandum written right after the Berlin Wall came down with no warning from the CIA, "The central and enduring problem of the security system is that ... the secrets are frequently wrong."

Moynihan's correspondence has been collected in a new book titled "A Portrait in Letters of an American Visionary," edited by my friend Steve Weisman. Moynihan took pains in his final 2000 letter to his constituents in New York to stress, "As I close out near on to a half century of government and politics, the great fear that I have is the enveloping culture of government secrecy and the corresponding distrust of government that follows. Since the end of the Cold War -- which, incidentally, all those secret agencies quite missed ... the secret side of government just keeps growing."

These words were written a year before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The terrorist threat has, of course, changed the nature of government secrets worth protecting: No one wants to publicize the vulnerabilities of nuclear power plants or the targeting instructions of Predator drones. But secrets like these are far different than an ambassador passing along unverified rumors about a "romantic relationship" between the Libyan dictator and his "voluptuous" nurse. Such details about Qaddafi are intriguing -- and might possibly be useful in Washington -- but they are not exactly the crown jewels of American intelligence.

That is the key word -- "intelligence" or the lack thereof. Maybe one reason why America is so bedeviled by WikiLeaks is that the nation has too much dumb bureaucratic over-classification and too little wise national security.

The WikiLeaks Dump: More Secrecy=Fewer Secrets - 11/29

Time.com / Massimo Calabresi

Most of the information in the more than 250,000 diplomatic cables dumped by the website WikiLeaks Sunday will prove to be quotidian and inconsequential. The fact that an American diplomat believes Russian president Dmitry Medvedev plays "Robin to [Russian Prime Minister Vladimir] Putin's Batman" is not going to shake the foundations of American diplomacy. Anyone who has followed the troubled effort by the Obama administration to close Guantanamo Bay will not be surprised to learn that hard-working emissaries have been begging countries to take some of the detainees at Camp X-Ray off America's hands. It is not shocking that the U.S. mission to the U.N. was asked in July 2009 to report on "views of United Nations (UN) member states on contributing troops and air transportation equipment, such as helicopters, to the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and the African Union."

But just because most of the documents don't directly threaten U.S. national interests doesn't mean all of them are benign. The revelation of Yemeni President Abdullah Saleh's acquiescence to American bombing in his country or of U.S. efforts to secure Pakistani nuclear material could endanger Americans at home and abroad. More important, those who are reassured by the gray communication of America's diplomats are missing the larger point: there is a direct relationship between the existence of classified banality and the dangerous disclosure of secrets that can harm America's national security.

America's government is consumed by classification. Hundreds of thousands of government documents are marked confidential, secret, top secret or SCI (Sensitive Compartmented Information) every year, including everything from decades-old historical documents to ones other agencies have already declassified. As the elder statesman of bipartisan secrecy skepticism, Senator Daniel Moynihan of New York, wrote in 1997, the more government declares everything secret, the less secure the actual secrets are. "The system grew so vast... that it began to appear unavailing," Moynihan wrote in his congressionally mandated bipartisan report, "Almost everything was declared secret; not everything remained secret, and there were no sanctions for disclosure." Larry Combest, the Republican from Texas who served as the Moynihan commission's vice chairman, said they were "confronted on many levels with the lack of credibility and loss of respect for the Government system of secrecy, born in part through overclassification, too much complexity, and the well-known phenomenon of self-perpetuating bureaucracy."

The problem became acute in the 1990s with a massive expansion of those who can create classified documents. In 1995, Bill Clinton issued executive order 12958, which gave some 20 officials, including the President, the power to classify documents as top secret, meaning their disclosure would likely "cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security" of the U.S. But the order also delegated that authority to 1,336 others, and granted derivative classification authority to some two million government officials and a million industry contractors, according to the Moynihan report.

The more government officials are empowered to classify documents, the more people doing government work need clearances to look at it. In 2008 alone DoD issued some 630,000 security clearances. In its deep investigation of American secrecy earlier this year, the Washington Post found some 854,000 had top secret clearance. The issuance of clearances has been flawed and unrigorous, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO). In 2009, the GAO found that "87% of about 3,500 investigative reports that adjudicators used to make clearance decisions were missing at least one type of documentation required by the federal investigative standards," including information on previous employment, social references and complete security forms. 12% of the reports didn't include a subject interview.

Which brings us to the source of the leak of the diplomatic cables. The U.S. government has arrested Bradley Manning, a private in the U.S. Army who had access to the SIPRNET system on which classified documents up to the designation "secret" are shared by U.S. government agencies around the world. Manning reportedly told a fellow hacker that he downloaded to CD discs compressed files of the cables and gave them to WikiLeaks. 11,000 of the documents are marked "secret", none are marked "top secret".

No one has yet found fault in Manning's security clearance issuance. And even without over-classification he might have obtained the documents and given them to WikiLeaks. But years of expanded classification and sprawling clearance issuance has vastly increased the pool of potential leakers to WikiLeaks, and has diminished the seriousness with which people treat the leaking of classified information. "Classification policy is close to the root of this scandal," says Steven Aftergood, author of the Secrecy News blog at the Federation of American Scientists. "A determined effort to combat overclassification would reduce the volume of material that requires protection, thereby improving the security of genuine secrets and it would increase public and official confidence in the integrity of the classification system, thereby reducing the motivation for, and tolerance of, unauthorized disclosures."

The Obama administration has said that it intends to address the problem, but DoD is resisting reform.

It's WikiLeaks' World, We Are Just Along For The Ride - 11/29

Time.com / Michael Scherer

Spies will spend a lifetime working to uncover a single piece of classified information. Reporters will spend months coaxing sources to reveal a single damning secret document. But that's not how it works in the online age, where the illusion of anonymity rules and a million documents can be transferred in the time it once sent to ride a horse to the telegraph office.

And so we have another WikiLeaks blockbuster, this one a batch of more than a quarter million diplomatic cables, numbering 216 million words that were written between 1966 and February of this year. Of the trove, about 15,000 documents were classified as secret. They reveal nothing totally unexpected, according to the news organizations that have searched the files, but plenty that is newsworthy.

In introducing the package, the WikiLeaks website gets a bit carried away by its own mythologizing. "Every American schoolchild is taught that George Washington – the country's first President – could not tell a lie," reads the introduction. "If the administrations of his successors lived up to the same principle, today's document flood would be a mere embarrassment." This is, of course, balderdash. International diplomacy, much like a civil courtroom, is based on a certain assumption of secrecy. Plaintiffs do not have a right or expectation to know what the defendant says to his attorney, just as one country's diplomats do not have a right to know the internal machinations of an opposing country's diplomats. This is true in any adversarial relationship requiring negotiation. No American schoolchild is taught that international diplomacy is without subterfuge or intrigue, or that George Washington would want it transparent.

And the documents that have been discussed so far--by WikiLeaks and a small fleet of news organizations--are not notable for any fibs about the cherry tree, at least not any fibs that the world did not already know to be ruses. (Is it news to anybody that the bombs that fall on suspected Al Qaeda in Yemen are not, as claimed, the result of Yemeni military action?) Rather, they show instead exactly what the U.S. government and its allies do not want its adversaries to see, the internal deliberations and often coarse discussions, that contribute to the current cannon of diplomatic knowledge on issues as sensitive as nuclear weapon and missile development in Iran, the apparent "Ukrainian nurse" mistress of Libya's strongman and the marriage gifts offered by Chechnya's strongman, Ramzan Kadyrov.

In these documents, we see hard evidence of what has long been suspected and sometimes documented, but not officially stated: Arab leaders have urged military action against the Iranian nuclear program; the Obama Administration has attempted to ease Chinese concerns about an Iranian fuel cut off; the U.S. military is skeptical of the efficacy of any strike on Iran; senior Afghan officials are elbow deep in corruption; the U.S. has tried to offload Guantanamo detainees on resistant countries; the Chinese government appears to sanction computer hacking; there are concerns about the security of the Pakistani nuclear weapons infrastructure; and dozens of other tidbits from around the globe.

We see diplomats describe Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi as "feckless, vain," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev as playing "Robin to (Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's) Batman," and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe as "the crazy old man"--observations that, if nothing else, should cheer global confidence in the descriptive powers of the U.S. diplomatic corps. We find out that the U.S. government tries to collect information and spy certain foreign officials, which is news mainly because this sort of fact should never be provable, even if everyone expects it to be true.

There is, in retrospect, an odd irony to the triumphalism of WikiLeaks, the lucky benefactors of an apparently troubled soldier who liked Lady Gaga. As with previous leaks, the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, has presented his release as a cudgel of truth against the great mendacity of American might. But his weapon is, in fact, far more ambiguous. Unlike a reporter or a spy, he is not after certain information. He is after transforming the idea of information, so that nation-states like the U.S. no longer feel entitled to misrepresent or color their own actions to fulfill better their interests. In this quest, he will fail. (The Pentagon, today, explained the steps it was taking to assure such leaks are not possible in the future.) He has succeeded, however, in sorely embarrassing the United States, its leaders, and the leaders of many other nations. He has also succeeded in shedding newsworthy light on a vast array of diplomatic intrigue, much of it complimentary of American efforts, which is fascinating to look at, even if it is pretty much what you expected.

It is far to soon to know how the ripples from this radical experiment in transparency will shape the world to come. But stay online. The answer may be just a click away.

Leaked U.S. Cables Expose Tensions With China - 11/29

Wall Street Journal | Jeremy Page

BEIJING—China repeatedly failed to act on U.S. requests for it to stop shipments of ballistic missile components from North Korea to Iran via Beijing airport in 2007, according to one of more than a quarter-million U.S. diplomatic cables made public Sunday.

Another of the cables, which were gathered by the website WikiLeaks, showed that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked China in February to act on intelligence that Iran was trying to buy gyroscopes and carbon fiber for its ballistic missiles from Chinese companies.

Mrs. Clinton also expressed concern in May that Chinese companies were supplying Iran with precursors for chemical weapons in contravention of U.N. sanctions, according to one more of the cables.

The cables reflect continuing U.S. concern that China isn't doing enough to prevent proliferation of missile and chemical weapons technology despite Beijing's introduction of export controls in 2002.

Their publication comes at a sensitive time in China-U.S. ties, as Beijing faces mounting pressure from Washington to rein in an increasingly belligerent North Korea ahead of a visit to the U.S. by President Hu Jintao in January.

The cables also highlight U.S. concerns about China's computer warfare capability, and its influence in Central Asia. And they give potentially embarrassing blow-by-blow accounts of meetings between U.S. and Chinese officials.

China's Foreign Ministry didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the cables. The U.S. State Department has called the leaks of the cables illegal and has sought to limit the diplomatic fallout through phone calls to dozens of foreign governments, according to U.S. officials. Mrs. Clinton spoke about the anticipated leaks by telephone with her Chinese counterpart, Yang Jiechi, on Friday, according to the State Department.

Five news organizations were given access to the documents ahead of their release: the New York Times, the Guardian of the U.K., Germany's Der Spiegel, France's Le Monde and Spain's El Pais.

One cable from the U.S. embassy in Beijing quoted an unidentified Chinese contact alleging in January this year that the Politburo, the powerful 25-person governing group in the Communist Party, ordered a cyberattack on Google Inc. as well as U.S. government computer systems.

A Google spokeswoman said: "We have conclusive evidence that the attack came from China." She declined to comment further, but Google said in January that cyberattacks on its corporate infrastructure originated from inside China. China's government has repeatedly denied any involvement in those or other attacks.

Another cable described how the U.S. ambassador in Kyrgyzstan confronted her Chinese counterpart, Zhang Yannian, over information obtained from Kyrgyz officials that China was offering the former Soviet republic \$3 billion in aid in exchange for its closing a U.S. airbase there.

"Visibly flustered, Zhang temporarily lost the ability to speak Russian and began spluttering in Chinese to the silent aide diligently taking notes right behind him," said the cable.

Mr. Zhang later composed himself, and "ridiculed" the idea without categorically denying it, the cable said.

Mr. Zhang, now China's ambassador to Azerbaijan, couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

The most serious allegation in the cables is that China repeatedly turned a blind eye to shipments of ballistic missile components from North Korea to Iran on commercial flights through Beijing airport.

A cable dated Nov. 3, 2007, and signed by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, said that a cargo of jet vanes—designed to stabilize missiles in flight—was set to be shipped from North Korea to Iran via Beijing on an Air Iran flight.

"The [State] department is seeking both immediate action... and a strategic approach with regards to this critical issue," the cable said.

"We now have information that the goods will be shipped on 4 November and insist on a substantive response from China," it said. "We assess that the best way to prevent these shipments in the future is for Chinese authorities to take action...that will make the Beijing airport a less hospitable transfer point."

Ms. Rice told the U.S. ambassador in Beijing to raise the issue "at the earliest opportunity" and "at the highest level possible" to persuade the Chinese authorities to halt the delivery, according to the cable.

She also told him to remind China that U.S. President George W. Bush had raised the issue with his Chinese counterpart, Mr. Hu, at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Sydney in September 2007.

It is unclear whether China stopped that shipment, but the cable complained that at least 10 similar deliveries had been allowed to proceed despite U.S. requests for them to be halted.

"Though Chinese officials informed Embassy Beijing that China's investigations have found no evidence of these transfers, it appears that these shipments did occur and are continuing to transit via Beijing," it said.

China pledged in 2000 not to assist any country to develop ballistic missiles that can be used to deliver nuclear weapons. China also introduced stricter export controls in 2002 and has applied to join the 34-country Missile Technology Control Regime.

But an analysis of the Iranian missile threat last month by Arms Control Today, which is published by the independent Arms Control Association in Washington, suggested U.S. pressure on Beijing has produced only mixed results.

Three cables sent by Mrs. Clinton in February this year show that the U.S. still has concerns about Iran obtaining missile technology from China.

One instructed U.S. diplomats to ask Chinese officials to act on intelligence that Iran was trying to buy Russian gyroscopes, which can help to stabilize and guide ballistic missiles, from a Chinese company.

"We are bringing this matter to your attention to support your export control efforts as we are concerned this equipment potentially could be diverted to missile-related end-users in Iran," it said. "We hope you will use this information to investigate this activity and take all appropriate measures..."

A second cable said Iran was trying to buy the same gyroscopes from China through a Malaysian company, and a third said Tehran was seeking to purchase five tons of carbon fiber—which could be used to make nozzles and casing for its missiles—from a Chinese company.

Another cable from Mrs. Clinton in May said the U.S. was concerned that exports by named Chinese companies "could be used for or diverted to a CW [chemical weapons] program."

Mrs. Clinton asked if these transfers were approved by the Chinese government and warned that sanctions may be imposed.

"We request that the Chinese government take all steps necessary to investigate this matter and to prevent Iran from acquiring dual-use equipment and technology that could be used in its CW program," the cable said.

TO Publish Leaks Or Not to Publish? – 11/29

Wall Street Journal / Russell Adams and Jessica E. Vascellaro

An organization has obtained secret documents. They are newsworthy, but they could be damaging as well, to national interests and individuals.

Do you publish?

News organizations are confronting that question as aggressive tactics like those of WikiLeaks become more common in an age of fast-moving information.

The roughly quarter-million cables released Sunday comprise a sampling of the traffic between the State Department and several hundred embassies and consulates. They include information about the conflict between the U.S. and Pakistan over nuclear fuel, Washington's discussions with South Korean officials about the future of North Korea, and bargaining with other countries over how to empty the Guantanamo Bay prison.

Anthony E. Varona, professor and associate dean at American University-Washington College of Law, said the line is still unclear between "giving the public the news it has a First Amendment right to receive and serving as instruments of lawlessness." He added that the courts had ruled on both sides of the argument over the years.

"The bottom line is whether publication by WikiLeaks, with amplification by the traditional news media, will advance the public interest and the First Amendment or threaten their very existence," Mr. Varona said. "The next several days will reveal much along these lines."

The New York Times, the Guardian of the U.K., Germany's Der Spiegel, France's Le Monde and Spain's El Pais gained access to the documents well ahead of their release, wrote extensive reports about them and attached some of the cables to their websites. In a note to readers on Sunday, the Times said its decision was justified by the importance of knowing how the government makes its decisions, the motivations of allies that receive U.S. aid and the diplomacy surrounding wars and countries in which American involvement is growing.

"The Times believes that the documents serve an important public interest, illuminating the goals, successes, compromises and frustrations of American diplomacy in a way that other accounts cannot match," the note read.

The Times said it had "taken care" to exclude "information that would endanger confidential informants or compromise national security." The paper also said in its note that most of the documents would have been made public regardless of the paper's decision, noting that WikiLeaks had shared the secret cables with at least four European publications.

The Guardian said in a note to readers that the publications that got prior access to the documents gave early warning to the U.S. government about their intention to publish and that officials didn't dispute the authenticity of the overall material. The Guardian said U.K. libel laws imposed a special burden on British publishers and it refrained from reporting on some cables.

WikiLeaks couldn't be reached for comment.

Bob Steele, the director of the Prindle Institute for Ethics at DePauw University, said that citizens had a right to hold government accountable. "That relates to the product of government and the process of government and what government leaders do and how they go about doing it," he said.

He added, however, that these cables are sensitive because they discuss diplomatic matters, and "there is potentially greater danger in the release of documents that address ongoing and sensitive negotiations and operations."

In a strategy aimed at raising its profile, WikiLeaks has been teaming up with news organizations on its leaks. Last week it offered The Wall Street Journal access to a portion of the documents it possesses if the Journal signed a confidentiality agreement. The Journal declined.

"We didn't want to agree to a set of pre-conditions related to the disclosure of the WikiLeaks documents without even being given a broad understanding of what these documents contained," a spokeswoman for the paper said.

CNN also declined to make an agreement with WikiLeaks. It declined to comment further.

The Guardian, which has collaborated with WikiLeaks on two previous leaks, said the documents were handed over on the condition that the news organizations observed common deadlines over the release.

The Times said it didn't get the documents directly from WikiLeaks, but Executive Editor Bill Keller said the paper agreed with the other publications to coordinate timing "to avoid a stampede that would make for sloppy journalism and increase the risk of publishing something dangerous."

He added: "It also allowed time for serious (and fruitful, in my view) discussions with the government about what to redact."

The Times said it received the cables by "a source who insisted on anonymity" and that the cables were originally obtained by WikiLeaks from a "disenchanted, low-level Army intelligence analyst who exploited a security loophole."

WikiLeaks in July published thousands of documents related to the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. Those documents tracked six years of the war, from early 2004 through late last year, and detailed various on-the-ground incidents including civilian deaths and episodes of friendly fire. They also included allegations that Pakistan aided Taliban insurgents against the U.S.

The New York Times, the Guardian and Der Spiegel published several stories based on the leaked documents, saying they took care not to publish information that would harm national security interests. After publication, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange argued that the documents could serve as "deterrents" to future war crimes.

Bob Giles, curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, said news organizations had demonstrated "good, ethical behavior" in how they had reported on the WikiLeaks documents in general, noting they had repeatedly withheld certain sensitive information.

WikiLeaks has landed a number of big scoops since it launched in 2007, including video footage of American soldiers shooting at a group of people in Iraq in 2007. The site, created by self-described Chinese dissidents and Internet hackers, has repeatedly declined to say how it gets its information and has been the subject of investigations by federal authorities.

Vast Leak Discloses Diplomatic Secrets – 11/29

Wall Street Journal | Jay Solomon, Adam Entous and Julian E. Barnes

The publication of a quarter-million sensitive diplomatic cables Sunday exposed years of U.S. foreign-policy maneuvering that could prove embarrassing to the U.S. and its allies, especially in the Islamic world.

Among activities detailed in the documents was the extensive, and increasingly successful, push by the U.S. for an international consensus to confront Iran's nuclear program. Five newspapers obtained early access to the documents, which had been gathered by the website WikiLeaks.

The cables showed how some Arab leaders were largely in sync with Israel to support greater financial penalties, if not military operations, against Iran unless it abandons its nuclear ambitions. Regarding Iran, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah was portrayed in an April 2008 memo as having told the U.S. "to cut off the head of the snake."

The cables showed the Obama administration working to get skeptical European states to back more-biting sanctions against Tehran, and also working to forestall United Nations vetoes of the effort by China and Russia.

One cable showed that U.S. intelligence believes Iran has obtained from North Korea powerful missiles able to reach European capitals.

The leaks, which the State Department decried as illegal, will undoubtedly place domestic pressure on key American allies shown to have cooperated closely with the Barack Obama and George W. Bush administrations, despite statements to the contrary at home.

The release was the third by WikiLeaks in recent months, following caches of U.S. documents about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The New York Times, the U.K.'s Guardian, Germany's Der Spiegel, El Pais of Spain and France's Le Monde gained access to the documents well ahead of their release and wrote extensive reports about them. Some of the cables—largely from 2007 through last February, many but not all classified—were attached to those organizations' websites. Though commonly called cables in the diplomatic world, they were encrypted emails sent by special devices.

The Wall Street Journal had declined to accept a set of preconditions related to disclosure of WikiLeaks documents, said a spokeswoman for Dow Jones, the News Corp. unit that publishes the Journal.

A February 2010 cable showed U.S. intelligence believes Iran has obtained from North Korea 19 powerful missiles, BM-25 models that are a version of a Russian design called the R-27. The cable said Iran has been trying to copy the missile's propulsion system to speed development of intercontinental ballistic missiles, an effort that, if successful, could add about 800 miles to the estimated 1,200-mile range of current Iranian missiles.

The documents presented often-stinging assessments of foreign leaders involved in the effort to combat Islamic radicalism. U.S. diplomats were portrayed as referring to allegedly corrupt business practices of Ahmad Wali Karzai, a half-brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Saudi King Abdullah was described as saying he viewed Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki as a proxy for Iran.

The State Department and Pentagon have sought to limit the diplomatic fallout and possible strategic losses by calling dozens of foreign governments, according to U.S. officials.

The disclosures "place at risk ongoing cooperation between countries—partners, allies and common stakeholders—to confront common challenges from terrorism to pandemic diseases to nuclear proliferation that threaten global stability," State Department legal adviser Harold Koh wrote to a lawyer for the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, Saturday, in a last-ditch effort to forestall publication.

U.S. diplomats and defense officials have worried the disclosures could undercut the ability of foreign leaders to continue cooperating with Washington on counter-terror and counter-proliferation operations, with Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan among those most focused on.

Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh allowed American forces to conduct counter-terror operations against al Qaeda militants inside his country. During a January meeting with visiting U.S. Gen. David Petraeus, the Yemeni leader made clear he wanted to disguise Washington's role, according to a cable from the American ambassador in Sana'a.

"We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," Mr. Saleh said, according to the cable, prompting Yemen's deputy prime minister to "joke that he had just 'lied' by telling Parliament" that Yemeni forces had carried out the strikes.

The cables also showed U.S. officials exploring ways to remove highly enriched uranium from a Pakistani nuclear site in a way that wouldn't spur a political backlash against Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari.

The leaked cables detailed a secret U.S. intelligence-gathering campaign at the U.N., blurring the line between the work of diplomats and spies. In a U.S. intelligence directive, American diplomats were asked to collect biometric information on key U.N. officials, from under secretaries to the heads of specialized agencies and peacekeeping operations. It also asked for intelligence on Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's management and decision-making style.

The secret document, titled "Reporting and Collection Needs: the United Nations," asked for both basic "biographical information" and detailed work schedules, credit-card numbers and frequent-flier accounts. Such information could be used to track the movements and activities of U.N. officials.

With respect to Iran's nuclear ambitions, one cable described Bahrain's King Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa as telling Gen. Petraeus last year the U.S. and its allies must use any means possible to deny Iran's government a nuclear arsenal. "The danger of letting it go on is greater than the dangers of stopping it," the king was quoted as saying.

The leaked cables show sometimes-derogatory ways America's allies referred to diplomatic partners. Saudi King Abdullah told U.S. officials that Pakistan's President Zardari was incapable of reforming his country. "When the head is rotten it affects the whole body," the Saudi monarch said, according to a cable.

Another cable has an Israeli official, Amos Gilad, speculating in 2009 about the life span of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, 82, and questioning whether his son, Gamal, was "ready to assume command."

Denunciations of WikiLeaks and Mr. Assange intensified Sunday, from both Democratic and Republican lawmakers. Rep. Peter King of New York, the ranking Republican on the House Committee on Homeland Security, called for Mr. Assange's arrest for violating the U.S. Espionage Act. Sen. John Kerry (D., Mass.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, described the release as "a reckless action which jeopardizes lives by exposing raw, contemporaneous intelligence."

A former low-level U.S. Army intelligence analyst stationed in Baghdad, Pfc. Bradley Manning, was charged earlier this year with improperly accessing a State Department cable on Iceland and providing it to WikiLeaks, and is being held in Virginia in pretrial detention. He hasn't been charged in connection with the three recent WikiLeaks leaks. In an electronic communication with a former hacker, since posted on the Internet, Pfc. Manning said he had taken 260,000 State Department cables. A lawyer for Mr. Manning declined to comment.

Analysis of world leaders gets personal – 11/29

Washington Post / Philip Rucker

The U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks offer unvarnished insights into the personal proclivities of world leaders and how American diplomats privately view them.

According to one such memo, Moammar Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, has an intense dislike of staying above the first floor of hotels and cannot climb more than 35 steps. His fear of flying creates logistical headaches for his staff, who make great attempts to avoid long flights over water.

And Gaddafi is reportedly obsessively dependent on traveling with a Ukrainian nurse described as a "voluptuous blonde" because she alone "knows his routine."

The details on Gaddafi were included in a State Department cable in September 2009 during the leader's visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly.

In the cable, Gene A. Cretz, U.S. ambassador to Tripoli, concluded: "While it is tempting to dismiss his many eccentricities as signs of instability, Qadhafi is a complicated individual who has managed to stay in power for forty years through a skillful balancing of interests and realpolitik methods."

This is one of many distinctly undiplomatic sketches of the world's leading statesmen contained in the documents released Sunday. Among the highlights, as reported by Britain's Guardian newspaper:

U.S. diplomats quoted sources describing North Korean leader Kim Jong Il as a "flabby old chap" and someone who had suffered "physical and psychological trauma" as a result of his stroke.

French President Nicholas Sarkozy, in the view of U.S. diplomats in Paris, has a "thin-skinned and authoritarian personal style" because of his tendency to rebuke his team and the French prime minister.

An official at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow wrote in late 2008 about the relationship between Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that Medvedev "plays Robin to Putin's Batman."

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is "feckless, vain and ineffective as a modern European leader," according to a U.S. official in Rome. Another cable remarked on Berlusconi's "frequent late nights and penchant for partying hard."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is described in one cable from Kabul as "an extremely weak man who did not listen to facts but was instead easily swayed by anyone who came to report even the most bizarre stories or plots against him."

Secret cables reveal that U.S. believes Iran has advanced missiles – 11/28

Washington Post / Philip Rucker

The United States believes Iran has obtained advanced missiles from North Korea that could reach Moscow and cities across Western Europe, one of several secret diplomatic assessments of Iran's weapons program disclosed publicly for the first time Sunday.

The treasure trove of secret State Department cables obtained by WikiLeaks and reported Sunday by several news organizations chronicle the Iranian nuclear standoff from its genesis. The diplomatic memos disclose the extent to which many of the United States's allies in the Arab world repeatedly implored Washington to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

In one such plea, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia reportedly urged U.S. officials in 2008 to "cut off the head of the snake" while there was still time.

In another, in May 2009, Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, argued that the world had six to 18 months "in which stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons might still be viable." According to a secret cable that the U.S. ambassador

to Israel, James B. Cunningham, sent to Washington, Barak said: "Any military solution would result in unacceptable collateral damage."

In November 2009, Bahrain's King Hamad argued forcefully for taking action to terminate Iran's nuclear program, by whatever means necessary, according to one diplomatic cable.

"The program must be stopped," Hamad said in a meeting with Gen. David H. Petraeus, then head of the U.S. Central Command. "The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it."

The accounts are based on a report published Sunday afternoon by the New York Times, one of five American and European news organizations granted advance access to the cables by WikiLeaks.

According to the accounts, the United States believes that North Korea is helping Iran achieve its atomic ambitions by helping the country develop more-formidable long-range ballistic missiles.

At the same time, the cables reportedly show how Israel, the Saudis and U.S. allies in the region have grown more unified in their desire to halt Iran's ascent. While those countries have been publicly cautious, for fear of retributions from their powerful neighbor, they privately clamored for strong steps by the United States, using diplomacy, covert action or force, according to the New York Times.

The cables show officials from Persian Gulf states unable to decide which would be worse: a strike against Iran and the resulting turmoil it would cause in the region, or inaction and having to live with a nuclear-capable Iran.

The cables reveal the deep distrust of Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, shared by U.S. diplomats and officials from America's Arab allies. In 2005, military leaders from the United Arab Emirates said during a meeting with the head of the U.S. Central Command, Gen. John P. Abizaid, that Ahmadinejad "seemed unbalanced, crazy even," according to one cable documented by the New York Times.

A few months later, the Emirates' defense chief, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi, told Abizaid that he believed the United States needed to take action against Iran "this year or next."

Yet the cables also appear to show the disparate attempts of Washington to confront Tehran. President Bush, focused on ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, struggled to put together even modest sanctions against Iran, according to the Times' report.

Meanwhile, President Obama was determined to not appear weak to the Iranians despite his promise of "engagement." The cables reportedly show how Obama's advisers rolled out a plan to encircle Iran with economic sanctions and antimissile defenses. Although the Obama administration expected this outreach to fail, it believed the effort would help build support for tougher measures.

And as the government obtained new intelligence about Iran's growing missile program, the Obama administration maneuvered to win Russian support for sanctions. It replaced a Bush-era plan for a missile defense site in Poland with one closer to Iran's coast. The cables also apparently reveal a successful U.S. plan to get the Saudis to offer China an increased supply of oil to wean it from energy dependence on Iran, which resulted in a commitment from China to join in sanctions against Iran.

The cables show that the Obama administration is doubtful that a military strike would keep Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb in the future. One cable earlier this year revealed that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates delivered a stark assessment to Herve Morin, the French defense minister. Any strike against Iran, Gates apparently said, "would only delay Iranian plans by one to three years, while unifying the Iranian people to be forever embittered against the attacker."

WikiLeaks's unveiling of cables shows delicate diplomatic balance with Pakistan - 11/28

Washington Post / Greg Miller

The latest document dump from WikiLeaks reveals the diplomatic high wire the United States is often walking in its relationship with countries that are considered crucial allies in fighting terrorism, such as Pakistan.

Cables that pertain to the U.S. relationship with Pakistan show the extent to which U.S. diplomatic officials think the American agenda is often undermined by the poor standing of the superpower among Pakistanis. One cable urges a reinvigorated effort at public diplomacy to shore up the United States' reputation and eat away at support for figures such as al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who is thought to be hiding in the tribal frontier of Pakistan.

The January 2009 cable, posted on the Web site of Der Spiegel, laments that many Pakistanis consider bin Laden "an Islamic hero because the U.S. has named him 'public enemy number one.' " A plan to distribute "wanted" posters and matchbooks depicting bin Laden - presumably advertising the U.S. offer of a reward for his capture - might only increase his stature "as a kind of folk hero," the cable says.

The perception of the United States also apparently has hampered a secret effort to move highly enriched uranium out of a Pakistani research reactor. U.S. officials have pushed Pakistan since 2007 to accept help in moving the material, fearing it could be diverted for illicit purposes, according to a New York Times description of cable traffic discussing the issue.

In May 2009, then-Ambassador Anne W. Patterson reported that Pakistan was refusing to allow American experts to visit the site and cited concern expressed by a Pakistani official that "if the local media got word of the fuel removal, 'they certainly would portray it as the United States taking Pakistan's nuclear weapons.' "

U.S. asked China to stop missile parts shipment to Iran - 11/29

Washington Post / John Pomfret

The United States asked China in 2007 to stop a shipment of ballistic missile parts going from North Korea to Iran through Beijing and indicated that the U.S. government was fed up with China's unwillingness to crack down on such trade, according to reports Sunday based on U.S. diplomatic cables.

Another cable highlighted U.S. concern this year that Chinese firms were supplying North Korea with precursors for chemical weapons - in what would be a violation of U.N. sanctions.

A third cable, quoting an unidentified Chinese contact interviewed in January, claimed that China's Politburo ordered Chinese hackers to break into Google's computer systems last year as part of a massive effort by Chinese state-backed saboteurs to infiltrate the e-mail accounts and databases of political dissidents and foreign governments.

The cables were among more than 250,000 U.S. diplomatic missives released Sunday by WikiLeaks.

U.S. officials have long accused China of failing to crack down on proliferation activities that occur on its territory. For decades, China was a major proliferator of missiles itself, but that activity seemed to slow in the 1990s under U.S. pressure. China passed export control laws, but Beijing has rarely, according to U.S. officials and the cables revealed Sunday, actively worked to stop proliferation from occurring on its territory.

According to a cable dated Nov. 3, 2007, and signed by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a North Korean cargo of missile jet vanes destined for Iran's ballistic missile program was set to be shipped the next day from North Korea via Beijing on an Iran Air flight.

"The [State] department is seeking both immediate action . . . and a strategic approach with regards to this critical issue," the cable says. "We now have information that the goods will be shipped on 4 November and insist on a substantive response from China. . . . We assess that the best way to prevent these shipments in the future is for Chinese authorities to take action . . . that will make the Beijing airport a less hospitable transfer point." It is unclear whether China moved to stop the shipment.

Earlier this year, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton continued to pressure China on proliferation issues, this time because it was apparently turning a blind eye to its own companies.

In that cable, in May, Clinton said the United States was concerned that exports by named Chinese firms "could be used for or diverted to a CW [chemical weapons] program."

With better sharing of data comes danger - 11/29

Washington Post / Ellen Nakashima

The release of a huge tranche of U.S. diplomatic cables has laid bare the primary risk associated with the U.S. government's attempt to encourage better information-sharing: Someone is bound to leak.

The U.S. intelligence community came under heavy criticism after Sept. 11, 2001, for having failed to share data that could have prevented the attacks that day. In response, officials from across the government sought to make it easier for various agencies to share sensitive information - effectively giving more analysts wider access to government secrets.

But on Sunday, the Web site WikiLeaks, which had previously released sensitive U.S. documents about the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq, once again proved that there's a downside to better information-sharing.

"One of the consequences [of 9/11] is you gave a lot of people access to the dots," said Jeffrey H. Smith, a former CIA general counsel. "At least one of the dots, apparently, was a bad apple."

While WikiLeaks has not identified the source of the more than 250,000 cables, suspicions have centered on an Army private, Bradley Manning, 23, who was also the suspected source of the military intelligence documents from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In a series of chats with an online companion, Manning said this spring that "*someone* i know" - apparently a coy self-reference - had gained access to 260,000 State Department cables from embassies and consulates around the world "explaining how the first world exploits the third, in detail."

"Hillary Clinton [sic], and several thousand diplomats around the world are going to have a heart attack when they wake up one morning, and finds an entire repository of classified foreign policy is available, in searchable format to the public," he said, according to logs of the chats given to The Washington Post.

Manning's attorney, David Coombs, declined to comment Sunday but has previously said he has no knowledge of whether his client leaked documents.

In recent weeks, senior administration officials have warned that the WikiLeaks disclosures could affect the balance of weighing the "need to know" versus the need to protect sensitive material, sources and methods.

The director of U.S. national intelligence, James Clapper, has said he believes the WikiLeaks releases will have a "chilling effect" on information-sharing.

"We have to do a much better job of auditing what is going on on any [intelligence community] computer," he said this month. "And so if somebody's downloading a half-million documents . . . we find out about it contemporaneously, not after the fact."

To prevent further breaches, the Pentagon announced Sunday it had ordered the disabling of a feature on its classified computer systems that allows material to be copied onto thumb drives or other removable devices.

The Defense Department will limit the number of classified systems from which material can be transferred to unclassified systems. It will also require that two people be involved in moving data from classified to unclassified systems.

Such efforts "should have been done long ago before any of this happened," said Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists. The rush to knock down so-called "stove-piping" without hardening operational security "was asking for trouble," he said.

Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-Mich.), vice chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, called the Pentagon's new security measures "Cyber 101." He questioned a database design that would allow an intelligence analyst in Baghdad - where Manning was stationed - access to State Department cables. "How would this help him do his job in Baghdad?"

The military relies on Siprnet, or Secret Internet Protocol Network, to transmit classified operational information securely and outside the commercial Internet.

A former senior intelligence official said that over the past decade access to Siprnet has ballooned to about 500,000 or 600,000 people, including embassy personnel, military officials from other countries, state National Guard officials and Department of Homeland Security personnel. That is partly in response to calls for data-sharing and partly because agencies such as the State Department wanted a way to communicate classified information without going to the expense of setting up their own network, said the former official, requesting anonymity because Siprnet's size and uses are considered a sensitive matter.

He said that the answer to network breaches is not to restrict access but to improve the vetting of personnel by strengthening the clearance process.

"The fact that you've got someone exfiltrating information doesn't mean you've got a technical problem," he said. "You've got a human problem."

The Pentagon has been on notice for several years that its database security was at risk. After WikiLeaks in 2007 posted a series of leaked military documents about tactics used in the battle of Fallujah in Iraq and alleged human rights violations at Guantanamo Bay prison, an analyst at the Army Counterintelligence Center wrote a classified report concluding that WikiLeaks posed a potential operational and information security threat.

The "possibility that current employees or moles within DoD or elsewhere are providing sensitive or classified information to WikiLeaks cannot be ruled out," the analyst, Michael Horvath, wrote in the February 2008 report. He recommended the military enhance training on proper handling of classified information and on how to detect and report on an insider threat. But according to a military source, no action was taken on his report.

While Aftergood welcomed the Pentagon's newly announced security measures, he said they do not address the problem of overclassification. "A more discriminating approach to classifying information would yield a smaller volume of information requiring protection, making it easier to protect," he said.

Simon Jenkins, a British journalist who writes a column for the Guardian, wrote in a blog Sunday that the recent leaks "have blown a hole" in the framework by which governments guard their secrets. "Words on paper can be made secure, electronic archives not," he said.

In the future, he added, "the only secrets will be spoken ones. Whether that is a good thing should be a topic for public debate."

BROADCAST

Secrets Revealed - 11/28

ABC World News with Diane Sawyer | Jonathan Karl and Jim Sciutto

DAN HARRIS: It reads like a spy novel, a huge trove of documents released just hours ago by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks lifts the curtain on the secret communications between Washington and the diplomats that we have stationed all over the globe. There are more than 250 documents in all, some of them confidential messages containing candid and often embarrassing observations about foreign leaders. Jon Karl starts us off tonight in Washington. Jon, good evening.

JONATHAN KARL: Good evening, Dan. It's important to point out that only about 15,000 of those 250,000 documents are actually classified and of those, none of them are classified at the top secret level. But, Dan, there is enough in there to cause some real embarrassment and potentially much worse.

Some of the most fascinating documents are about Iran, depicting Arab leaders practically begging the U.S. to prevent the Iranian government from getting nuclear weapons. "That program must be stopped," Bahrain's king tells General David Petraeus in November, 2009. "The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it." The former minister of the United Arab Emirates says, "Ahmadinejad is Hitler" and tells a top State Department official, quote, "The threat from al Qaeda would be minor if Iran has nukes."

In these private dispatches posted online by the "New York Times" and other papers, several Arab governments take a line virtually identical to Israel's. In another meeting with General Petraeus, the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. describes King Abdullah urging the U.S. to attack Iran saying, quote, "The use of military pressure against Iran should not be ruled out." But Defense Secretary Robert Gates is quoted telling France's defense minister that an attack on Iran "would only delay Iranian plans by one to three years, while unifying the Iranian people to be forever embittered against the attacker."

Many of the documents are simply embarrassing. For example, in the effort to close Guantanamo, the State Department plays what the "New York Times" calls "let's make a deal," offering foreign governments rewards for agreeing to take prisoners. Slovenia, for example, is told if it wants to get a meeting with President Obama, it needs to take a prisoner. In an apparent sign of corruption, U.S. drug agents catch Afghanistan's vice president in the UAE with \$52 million in cash. The DEA officials looked the other way.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's visit to New York last year is the subject of several documents detailing his strange behavior, including his relationship with a, quote, "voluptuous blonde described as his senior Ukrainian nurse always by his side."

One of the most damaging documents describes a meeting in January between General Petraeus and the president of Yemen, where the United States had conducted several secret drone strikes on suspected al Qaeda targets. "We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," Yemen's president tells Petraeus, prompting another Yemeni official at the meeting to "joke that he had just lied by telling Parliament" that Yemeni forces had carried out the attack.

U.S. officials have condemned the leaks as outrageous and dangerous. And, Dan, they have taken steps to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again, for example, in changes that have already been implemented, it is now impossible for a single individual to move classified information off a government computer.

HARRIS: Jon, stick around because we want to come to you in just a moment. But let's go now to Jim Sciutto, who's over in London. Jim, given the angry response we're hearing from the Obama administration tonight, the question is how bad is all of this for our national security?

JIM SCIUTTO: Well, Dan, the key effect here may be diplomatic discomfort, but serious enough discomfort to affect key relationships with U.S. allies. And in a sign of just how concerned U.S. officials are, the damage control began long before today's release.

There are unflattering views of key U.S. allies: Russian President Vladimir Putin mockingly called the alpha dog; French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the emperor with no clothes. But the real damage may be to those we call allies in the fight against terrorism. Afghan President Hamid Karzai is described as, quote, "driven by paranoia," his brother believed to lie, quote, "when it suits his needs." And there's that revelation about Yemen's president agreeing to lie about U.S. air strikes in his country. Will that hamper the U.S. counterterrorism effort there going forward?

For WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, the question is what he believes the revelations will accomplish, one we raised with him during a documents release earlier this year.

What drives you?

JULIAN ASSANGE [Founder, WikiLeaks]: (From tape.) Defending victims and I'm a combative person so I like to crush – (inaudible). So it is deeply firstly personally deeply satisfying to me.

SCIUTTO: U.S. official argue, however, the release will actually create more victims exposing and damaging local leaders, dissidents and diplomats who the White House says are working to end wars, wars Assange opposes. And so they say he's actually working against his own stated goals, Dan.

HARRIS: A lot of focus on that man tonight. Jim, stand by. I want to bring Jon back in. Jon, on this question of whether these leaks will hurt our interests abroad, one of the things we keep hearing from the White House is that it will compromise our intelligence assets. People who give us information in secret will be named in some of these documents, they say. How serious a concern is that really?

KARL: Well, there are certainly concerns that lower level sources can be named and that their lives can be put at risk, Dan. But in terms of real top intelligence assets, spies and foreign governments, those kind of names you would never see in documents classified at this level. Those would be classified in top secret. At the minimum, as we said earlier, there are no top secret documents in these leaks.

HARRIS: And one last question for you, Jim. Apparently this story is not over. There are more revelations to come. What do we know about that?

SCIUTTO: Well, there are 250,000 documents we've seen today, just the highlights of some of them, a small percentage of them and dozens of news stories planned over the course of this week. We know in the UK, for instance, there are going to be revelations about devastating criticism of the UK's military operations in Afghanistan by U.S. commanders as well as criticisms of the British leader David Cameron, so possibly more diplomatic discomfort, Dan, to come.

HARRIS: As we said, more revelations to come, and as you said, more diplomatic discomfort to come. Jim Sciutto and Jon Karl reporting on WikiLeaks tonight. Thank you, both.

WikiLeaks – Secrets Revealed – 11/28

NBC Nightly News / Jim Miklaszewski and Andrea Mitchell

NATALIE MORALES: Good evening. We begin with a developing story at this hour as we're getting our first look at some of the details being revealed in hundreds of thousands of classified and secret documents from the State Department obtained by the online site WikiLeaks. It was set to release those documents this afternoon, defying U.S. government demands when WikiLeaks said it experienced a cyber attack. However, news organizations around the world, including the "New York Times," are publishing the leaked diplomatic cables.

Meanwhile, at the State Department, it has already been a long weekend of damage control with even Secretary of State Hillary Clinton working the phone lines to warn foreign governments of the potentially damaging and mostly embarrassing documents.

We begin tonight at our Washington bureau where Jim Miklaszewski has been poring through the documents. Mik, let's begin with what is really in these cables that is most damaging.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI: Quite frankly, Natalie, you can take your pick, there's so much embarrassing information contained in these hundreds of thousands of cables that it seems no one person or issue comes out of this unscathed.

Some of America's most confidential communiqués are found in these diplomatic cables, more than 250,000 obtained by the website WikiLeaks. Twenty-four thousand are marked secret or too sensitive to share with a foreign government and it's easy to see why. The cables provided in advance to several media outlets tear the cover off some U.S. secret operations and offer up embarrassing critiques of world leaders.

One cable involves efforts by the U.S. and Yemen to cover up American involvement in missile strikes against al Qaeda targets. In a January meeting, Yemen's president, Abdullah Saleh, told General David Petraeus, "We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," admitting that he had "just lied to his own parliament."

Another reveals a secret U.S. effort to get Pakistan to hand over enriched uranium from the nuclear reactor seen here for fear it could be used in a rogue nuclear weapon. But last May, U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson wrote home saying the effort failed because Pakistani officials feared that local media "would portray it as the United States taking Pakistan's nuclear weapons."

U.S. officials fear such leaks could jeopardize future cooperation in the critical war against terrorists.

HEATHER CONLEY [Center for Strategic and International Studies Director]: (From tape.) This could shake governments. It could end programs and it could seriously imperil U.S. foreign policy.

MIKLASZEWSKI: The leaks appear to spare no one. The cables reportedly reveal Saudi King Abdullah repeatedly urged the U.S. to attack and destroy Iran's nuclear program to cut off the head of the snake, and that German Chancellor Merkel is risk adverse and rarely creative.

ROGER CRESSEY [NBC News Terrorism Analyst]: (From tape.) You're going to see the unvarnished truth. You're going to see the actual opinion that our ambassadors, our senior officials have overseas of their counterparts. It's not going to be pretty in many cases. It's going to be very honest and it might be very harsh too.

MIKLASZEWSKI: But one of the most embarrassing revelations may involve the U.S. State Department. Cables that reportedly show Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Condoleezza Rice before her, ordered U.S. intelligence services to gather private information on U.N. leaders and diplomats, including computer passwords, even DNA and fingerprints.

The White House tonight condemned WikiLeaks' release of classified documents. In a White House statement, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs warns such disclosures put at risk our diplomats, intelligence professionals and people around the world. Joint Chiefs Chairman, Admiral Mike Mullen said it also threatens the lives of American forces at war.

ADM. MIKE MULLEN [Joint Chiefs Chairman]: (From tape.) So I think it's a very, very dangerous precedent.

MIKLASZEWSKI: The prime suspect in these massive leaks remains 23-year-old Army intelligence analyst, Pfc. Bradley Manning, who remains in military custody tonight.

The intriguing issue tonight is that WikiLeaks claims they're not able to post these cables themselves because somebody's hacked into their website. A senior defense official tells us tonight if that's true, we don't know anything about it. Natalie.

MORALES: And, Mik, do we get a sense is this just the beginning of the leaks from the State Department?

MIKLASZEWSKI: Well, I think it's important to point out here that many of those 250,000 cables have multiple pages, which State Department officials say could run into the millions. So this tonight may be just the tip of the iceberg.

MORALES: NBC's Jim Miklaszewski there in Washington for us. Thank you, Jim.

And NBC's chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell joins us now. Andrea, as we reported, the State Department worked feverishly to try to stop these leaks, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. So what is the reaction there tonight?

ANDREA MITCHELL: Well, you can imagine. This is a nightmare, Natalie, a nightmare for U.S. diplomats, what the German magazine "Der Spiegel" is calling a political meltdown for U.S. foreign policy.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spent the weekend basically speed dialing her counterparts in China, in Germany, Great Britain, Canada, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France and Afghanistan, just to name a few, trying to limit the damage.

But if you've ever had a friend learn that you've said unflattering things about them behind their back, well, you can imagine the reaction, especially when you're talking about the most sensitive issues of foreign policy like U.S. concerns over Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, as Mik reported, or Saudi King Abdullah's desire for the U.S. to attack Iran, or Clinton's suspicions about Vladimir Putin's business dealings with Italy's Prime Minister Berlusconi.

Already officials tell me that they have changed the State Department computer system to better protect diplomatic secrets from Pentagon access, this because officials point out that the Pentagon is the suspect for the original source of this leak.

And I'm also told that this will now cause a government-wide reexamination of those post-9/11 reforms requiring agencies to share their intelligence with each other. Natalie?

MORALES: So Andrea, the real question I guess is in this age of war and terror, what really is the potential fallout? Could this then be a game changer for U.S. foreign relations?

MITCHELL: I think it is. It really is a game changer. I think the potential fallout is unlimited now with both allies and adversaries. They won't trust us basically because they know that both Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice ordered intelligence gathering, spying on foreign officials. This crosses a very important line because while everyone knows that such spying does take place, diplomats have a very special legal immunity and if they're now accused of spying, this could expose them to grave dangers.

And also in a bit of very bad timing for Secretary Clinton, Natalie, she is leaving tomorrow on a previously scheduled trip to four countries starting with a European security summit in Kazakhstan. And she's going to have to face some of the very officials from the same countries that the U.S. has now criticized most harshly in these secret cables. Natalie.

MORALES: That's going to be very, I can imagine, uncomfortable for her.

MITCHELL: Exactly.

MORALES: Thanks so much. Andrea Mitchell in Washington as well.

WikiLeaks Releases New Round of U.S. Documents - 11/28 *CNN Newsroom / Tim Lister*

JOE JOHNS, CNN ANCHOR: Hello. I'm Joe Johns. Don Lemon is off.

Tens of thousands of what were once confidential U.S. government documents are available to anyone worldwide -- thanks to the self-styled whistleblower Web site called WikiLeaks. The documents were first released to "The New York Times" and four major European papers. They include candid assessments on everything from Iran's nuclear program to instability in Pakistan and the Middle East.



U.S. government officials condemn the release. They say it could compromise relations with allies. Even put lives in danger.

CNN is not among the news outlets given advance access to the materials. CNN declined to sign a confidentiality agreement with WikiLeaks.

Our Tim Lister, who is a person we depend on day and night to tell us the facts and what we know and what we don't know. He's with us right now, sort of analyzing, going through these reports. I think we should start, as we've said before, talking about Iran, which seems to be the major disclosure we've been able to find so far.

TIM LISTER, CNN EXECUTIVE EDITOR: That's right. It's important to say, Joe, we've been only been able to see a fraction of the documents so far. They only came out within the last two to three hours and many more are still to come. They're going to leak these out over a period of days and maybe weeks. But what does come across in your first analysis of the raw documents is just how Iran's nuclear program is a matter of concern, not just for Israel, but for a lot of the moderate Arab states in the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and others.

The Saudis particularly concerned in a meeting that King Abdullah had with John Brennan back in 2009 that the Iranian program should be stopped before it goes to the point where it can't be stopped. The king of Bahrain, the Omanis and others, all expressing very much the same sort of view. So, that really comes across as number one feature of these cables so far.

JOHNS: And there's this one comment we've seen and talked about, cutting off the head of the snake. That actually did not come from Israel, as you might expect, but someone much more familiar, if you will, with Iran.

LISTER: That came from King Abdullah who, in a wide-ranging conversation with John Brennan, makes it clear that he's got no confidence whatsoever in the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, who he regards as an agent of Iran. He recounts to John Brennan how he just had a heated conversation with the Iranian foreign minister and warned him that you Persians have no business in Arab affairs -- a really difficult meeting.

He also talks about a back channel the Saudis have tried to set up with the Iranians, had never been used. But he also talks about how he wants the U.S. to restore its credibility in the Middle East starting at that moment -- March, 2009, three months after President Obama had taken office.

JOHNS: Second on the list, among the things we know a little bit about already, is the issue of Pakistan. And the concerns about its nuclear materials, if you will, falling into the wrong hands.

LISTER: That's very true. I think we'll see much more in the way of documents coming out about Pakistan. We know that over the last two years or so, the United States has had a very troubled relationship with the Pakistanis, trying to get them to take on militants in North Waziristan, for example, trying to get them to cooperate on the Afghan track.

But also, there is this concern about the nuclear materials and the U.S. ambassador sent a cable back to Washington to say, I can't get access for American technicians to this exploratory reactor which has this highly-enriched uranium fuel simply because the Pakistanis are terrified it will get out into the media and then the whole relationship will be put into question. The Pakistanis aware that the domestic pressure has very much played in to their attitudes towards the United States and the level of cooperation that they'll offer to the United States.

JOHNS: You're certainly well-read and you've seen the world. Is this shocking to you or is it about what we would expect in diplomatic conversation? LISTER: I think what's interesting is that you see here the candor of diplomats when they don't think they're being observed or quoted, and they're prepared to make much franker assessments. For example, as one cable from the ambassador in Egypt talking about Hosni Mubarak and his visceral hatred towards the Iranians and talks also about how the Egyptian foreign minister is somewhat vain and has a tendency to lecture people.

So, you see some of the personalities coming into this. I believe we haven't seen the documents, that there's also some fairly negative comments about Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, for example, and how when backed into a corner, she tends to be less than creative. And a lot of U.S. ambassadors around the world are going to find their jobs a little bit more difficult after this stuff comes out and the next time they go to the foreign ministry, it's going to be in the back of their minds.

WikiLeaks Documents to Impact U.S. Foreign Relations - 11/28

CNN Newsroom / Jill Dougherty

JOHNS: Fascinating stuff. Thank you so much, Tim Lister, for coming in and sharing with us.

U.S. government reaction to the WikiLeaks document release has been quick and harsh.

CNN foreign affairs correspondent Jill Dougherty is standing by with more reaction from the U.S. and around the world.

Jill, damage control already under way.

JILL DOUGHERTY, CNN FOREIGN AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT: You know, it's been under way for quite a while, Joe, because after all, knowing that something was coming, the U.S. government and State Department already were notifying foreign governments that this was coming, talking about a potential impact.

And if you look at what the White House and the State Department and the Pentagon are doing right now, they're condemning in no uncertain terms, but they're not getting into any specifics, at least at this point. They're not saying, for example, how did this come about that there was a particular statement by an ambassador. They're simply not playing that game.

And the difficulty for them right now is that these documents are coming out in waves. I mean, as Tim pointed out, some come today, some will be coming later, and a lot of them, although they go back -- a lot of them go way back, but the major part concern the Obama administration. So, it is something that this administration really has to answer. They can't, Joe, say that, you know, it was a previous administration that did that.

JOHNS: We've heard a lot of talk about how this is supposed to damage U.S. relations with other countries. Around the world, is that a fact? Do you think when we get to the end of the day or has everyone been sufficiently warned to brace for whatever may be in some of these documents?

DOUGHERTY: You know, it's hard to assess right now. I did speak with a couple of embassies and what they said is, we're going through those documents. We want to know exactly what's out there, how it could impact. They're really studying it, but I think it's really important to point out that although this may seem surprising to the average person, this is how diplomacy is done. If these people who are in the field, ambassadors and people in embassies and consulates all over the world were not giving that information, then they wouldn't be doing their job.

Now, it's raw, unvarnished. It can be embarrassing, but that is their job. They're kind of like journalists, in a way, swooping up, sweeping up that information around the world and sending it back. And that is how diplomacy is conducted.

So, right now, we're going to be waiting for the other embassies around the world, perhaps international leaders who might say something.

But, again, Joe, this is not a surprise to people who do this for a living. It's not a surprise to other embassies that this is precisely what is done. At least what we've seen so far.

JOHNS: Jill Dougherty, thanks so much and we'll be checking back in with you on this story.

WikiLeaks Claims Computer Attacked - 11/28

CNN Newsroom / Peter Bergen and Josh Levs

JOHNS: We are tracking U.S. and world reaction this hour to the release of tens of thousands of U.S. government documents. WikiLeaks.com gave the documents to five major world newspapers, including "The Guardian" of London and "The New York Times." U.S. officials say the sensitive diplomatic cables could damage U.S. relations with other countries, even put lives at risk. The reports include revelations about Iran's nuclear program, the transfer of prisoners from Guantanamo Bay, and U.S. relations with Pakistan.

CNN national security analyst, Peter Bergen, is here to talk about the WikiLeaks documents and their impact on the U.S. and its allies.

Peter, you've been reading these reports. What jumps out at you initially?

PETER BERGEN, CNN NATIONAL SECURITY ANALYST: Well, the big story, something that's not entirely surprising, is the extent to which Arab nations around the gulf are united in their desire to, in some ways, sabotage or have somebody else sabotage the Iranian nuclear program. And we have multiple accounts of Arab leaders in conversations with U.S. officials saying that they hope, you know, that action is taken. Of course, if action was taken, it would be taken most likely by Israel, which is another account, particularly in "The Guardian," of the extent to which Israeli leaders are constantly said in private meetings that they're contemplating military action against Iran.

Now, none of this is really very surprising. The Arab countries are, of course, all Sunni, generally speaking, and they are very concerned about an ideologically Iranian nuclear state, a Shia state with a nuclear weapon. Nor is it surprising that Israel's planning military action. This is something journalists have been writing about for years now. But it's interesting to see these things also show up in these raw documents, accounts of meetings, Joe.

JOHNS: Another issue that's definitely surfaced in these documents is something we've talked about for a while and that is corruption in Afghanistan. You've also seen in these documents some of the more pointed references to that.

BERGEN: Indeed. There is one account of the vice president of Afghanistan allegedly traveling with \$52 million when he was visiting the gulf. Now, since Afghan government officials are paid officially, only a few thousand dollars a month at most, the fact that this guy is traveling around with \$52 million is pretty strange.

JOHNS: Absolutely. You also wanted to talk a little bit about something you've seen on Yemen, and that's been circulating around the newsroom here as those documents got released today.

BERGEN: Yes, I mean, as you know, Joe, there have been strikes in Yemen against al Qaeda-associated targets. It's sort of an open secret that these targets, these strikes have been done by the United States. For the reasons plausible deniability, the word is being put out they have been done by the Yemeni government. In fact, as these documents show, the Yemeni government's well aware that they're done by the United States and we even see President Saleh, the president of Yemen, and others in his circle, sort of joking about it with U.S. officials.

So, again, similar to Iran, stuff that we sort of knew about already or had certainly assumed that the United States was involved in direct strikes in Yemen, confirmed by these cables.

JOHNS: Certainly, much more blunt conversations between diplomats than we hear when they go out and talk to the media and to the cameras.

Thank you so much, Peter Bergen, for that.

BERGEN: Thank you.

JOHNS: The WikiLeaks web site has been down for much of today. In a statement posted on Twitter, the site claims its servers have been under electronic attack.

Josh Levs now joins me with more on that.

Josh, the site did come up for a while. Is it still up?

JOSH LEVS, CNN CORRESPONDENT: It did, yes. Last we checked, it's still going and they also sent out tweets, all within the last couple of hours. We followed the web site all day long looking for when there would be this actual posting, when they would talk about what it is they would put out today. It's just in the last couple of hours, the site came up, they

sent out a tweet. What I've done is I've pulled on the key quotes from what WikiLeaks has put out there. I want you to see, when they talked about what they've now released.

Take a look at this. They're calling this the largest set of confidential documents ever to be released into the public domain. That's the statement they have put out just in the last couple hours. They say it will give people around the world an unprecedented insight into U.S. government foreign activities. Now, this is the mega quote I want you to see here, because this is where they summarize what's in it. They say, "The cables show the extent of U.S. spying on its allies and the U.N. turning a blind eye to corruption and human rights abuse in client states, backroom deals with supposedly neutral countries, lobbying for U.S. corporations and the measures U.S. diplomats take to advance those who have access to them." They write a lot about their philosophies about what they feel they're doing, about why they believe it's so important.

A couple of numbers I want to break down for you here. They say just over 250,000 documents total. and keep in mind, these go all the way back to 1966 in some cases. We're talking about decades of documents. Many of them confidential, including this number. Take a look at how many are confidential. About 50,000 secret, 101,000, 102,000 confidential. About 134,000, they say, were unclassified. Those are some of the key numbers and some of the basic ideas here. When we take a look at what they say about what all this is, they also talk about their philosophy on what it is that they're doing. And they say -- they have a quote here about George Washington. And, Joe, I'll mention this to you. They say, "Every American school child is taught that George Washington could not tell a lie." They say, "If the administration of his successors lived up to that idea, then this posting would be just an embarrassment." And they go on to say, "Instead, it's a lot more."

And they're sending out warnings, suggesting that the government throughout generations, throughout various administrations has lied to the people, and that it's their philosophy that they are now trying to prove that and show the world all sorts of truths.

Obviously, we're hearing a lot of the criticisms and, Joe, we'll be hearing a lot more in the coming days, weeks, months. They say they have so many documents, they're going to drop them in basically sessions over the coming weeks to bring attention to all of them.

JOHNS: Without weighing into their rhetoric, if you will, it's certainly true that a lot of these documents we've seen really do shed some light on the way diplomats communicate around the world. And just that is fascinating in and of itself.

LEVS: And the way government works behind the scenes sometimes.

JOHNS: That's for sure. The philosophy, I'll let somebody else debate.

Thanks so much, Josh Levs.