

Wikileaks releases secret US cables

US leaked cables sparks anger in Europe

BBC ONLINE

The controversial whistle-blowing site Wikileaks has released a cache of 250,000 secret messages sent by US diplomatic staff.

So far, Wikileaks has published on its site 220 of 251,287 of what it describes as US "cables"; it has given the files in full to five media groups, including the New York Times and Guardian newspapers.

Below are some of the key issues the documents reveal.

IRAN ATTACK

Several Arab leaders and their representatives are quoted as urging the US to carry out an attack on Iran to bring an end to its suspected nuclear weapons programme.

The Saudi ambassador to Washington, Adel al-Jubeir, recalled King Abdullah's "frequent exhortations" to the US to attack Iran in order to bring an end to its nuclear programme.

In a report of a 2008 meeting with US General David Petraeus, al-Jubeir said the king wanted the US "to cut the head off the snake".

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain is reported to have told the US to stop Iran "by whatever means necessary", while the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed, told the US he believed Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was "going to take us to war".

SPYING ON UN A cable to US diplomats issued under US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's name tells them to collect "biographic and biometric" information - including iris scans, DNA samples and fingerprints - of key officials at the UN.

The officials covered include "undersecretaries, heads of specialised agencies and their chief advisers, top SYG [secretary general] aides, heads of peace operations and political field missions, including force commanders".

At least nine similar directives covering various countries are included in the Wikileaks release, both under the name of Hillary and her predecessor, Condoleezza Rice.

PAKISTAN STAND-OFF Cables reported in the New York Times show US concern over radioactive material in nuclear power stations in Pakistan, with fears it could be used in terror attacks.

In a May 2009 cable, US ambassador Anne W Patterson says Pakistan had refused a visit from US experts. She quotes a Pakistan official as saying removing the fuel would be seen in Pakistan "as the United States taking Pakistan's nuclear weapons".

CHINA WARNINGS In November 2007, the US urged Beijing to stop the shipment of ballistic missile components from North Korea to Iran, according to a cable released by the Guardian.

The goods were being moved through Beijing, and Washington demanded a "substantive response" to their request. "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," the cable states.

China was also cited in another cable, reported in the New York Times, over concern at its alleged growing use of large-scale computer hacking.

The cable claims that a network of hackers and private security experts has been employed by China since 2002 and that it has hacked into US government and business computers, those of Western allies and the Dalai Lama.

The cable quotes a "Chinese contact" telling the US embassy in Beijing that the Chinese government had been behind the hacking of Google's computer systems in the country in January.

GERMANY RENDITION ROW Cables reported in the New York Times show US concern over radioactive material in nuclear power stations in Pakistan, with fears it could be used in terror attacks.



View of the WikiLeaks homepage taken in Washington on Sunday. Whistleblower website 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 2004, a German citizen was snatched in Macedonia and allegedly taken to a secret prison by the CIA. Agents had apparently mistaken him for an al-Qaeda suspect.

A 2007 cable from the US embassy in Berlin details the efforts the US made to persuade Germany not to issue international arrest warrants for the CIA agents accused of involvement.

In an account of a high-level meeting between US and German officials, the cables states that US diplomats "pointed out that our intention was not to threaten Germany, but rather to urge that the German government weigh carefully at every step of the way the implications for relations with the US".

KOREA PLANS US and South Korean officials have discussed plans for a united Korea, should North Korea collapse.

The US ambassador to Seoul said South Korea would consider offering commercial incentives to China to "help solve" Beijing's "concerns about living with a reunified Korea".

GUANTANAMO The cables appear to reveal discussions between various countries on whether they would take prisoners released from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility.

Slovenia is offered the chance to meet President Barack Obama if it takes a prisoner, while Kiribati, in the South Pacific, is offered millions of dollars of incentives. Brussels is told taking prisoners could be "a low-cost way for Belgium to attain prominence in Europe".

WORLD LEADERS Various world leaders are covered by the documents - showing the diplomats' less than flattering views of them.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is referred to as "feckless, vain, and ineffective as a modern European leader" by a US diplomat in Rome.

US diplomats were similarly unimpressed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, describing her as "risk averse and rarely creative".

A 2009 cable from the US embassy in Tripoli claims that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi "appears to have an intense dislike or fear of staying on upper floors".

The cable also says Colonel Gaddafi "relies heavily" on his Ukrainian nurse, who has been described as a "voluptuous blonde", and speculates that the two are involved in a romantic relationship.

Zimbabwe Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai is praised as a "brave, committed man" in a 2007 cable written by then ambassador to Harare, Christopher Dell.

But the flattery does not last, and Dell goes on to say: "Tsvangirai is also a flawed figure, not readily open to advice, indecisive and with questionable judgement in selecting those around him."

In 2008, the Moscow embassy described Russian President Dmitry Medvedev as playing Robin to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's Batman.

The cables also comment on the extremely close relationship between Berlusconi and Putin. North Korea's Kim Jong-il is a "flabby old chap" suffering from trauma from a stroke, while Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is referred to as "Hitler".

South Africa's international relations and cooperation minister refers to President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe as "the crazy old man".

Embarrassed silence in Gulf on Iran

AFP, Dubai

necessarily what was said in private meetings with American officials.

Despite countries calling for a political resolution to the controversy over Iran's uranium enrichment project, the cables show that in addition to Riyadh, both Manama and Abu Dhabi suggested a radical solution may be necessary.

"There is disappointment from all US allies. This is supposed to be classified information. There is also embarrassment," said Saudi analyst Abdulaziz Sager, chairman of the Dubai-based Gulf Research Centre.

"The question is, how far do you trust the US and their secrecy after this misuse of information? They will take precautions in the future" in their relations with Washington, he said.

Among the more than a quarter of a million previously secret US cables is a document citing Bahrain's King Hamad as telling General

Petraeus on November 1, 2009, that Iran's nuclear programme "must be stopped."

"The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it," the king added, according to the cable.

Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed al-Nahayan, Abu Dhabi's crown prince and deputy chief of the UAE armed forces, was quoted as saying in a July 2009 meeting with US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner that "a near term conventional war with Iran" was "clearly preferable to the long term consequences of a nuclear armed Iran."

The revelations will wreck confidence between the United States and its Arab allies in the Gulf, according to Riad Kahwaji who heads the Institute for Near East & Gulf Military Analysis in Dubai.

"For Gulf countries, this shows that the United States is incapable of protecting its own documents, and that will have negative repercussions on their relations," he told AFP.

US standoff with Pakistan over nuclear fuel

AFP, Islamabad

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.

Pakistan yesterday criticized the release of classified US diplomatic cables that reportedly raise concerns that highly enriched uranium could be diverted from its nuclear program to build an illicit weapon.

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

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.

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.

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.

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. "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.

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Prince Andrew remarks 'to be released by WikiLeaks'

AFP, London

Prince Andrew is cited in classified US diplomatic documents for making "inappropriate remarks".

The Guardian reported Monday, citing data released by whistle-blowing website Wikileaks.

The documents refer to "inappropriate remarks by Prince Andrew about a UK law enforcement agency and a foreign country".

The Guardian said, although it has yet to give further details on what exactly the royal said.

Buckingham Palace declined to comment but a palace source told The Daily Mail: "We are awaiting further detail, as everyone is."

Australia investigates Assange

AP, Canberra

Police were investigating whether any Australian law was broken by the latest leaking of confidential documents by online whistleblower Wikileaks, the attorney-general said Monday.

Robert McClelland said he was not aware of a request from the United States to cancel Wikileaks founder Julian Assange's Australian passport.

A range of options were under consideration by Australian government agencies in response to the latest disclosure of classified US material, he said.

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

Defense Minister Stephen Smith said later that a cross-government committee was studying the documents to ascertain what damage could be done by their release.

US expands role of diplomats in spying

THE NEW YORK TIMES, Washington

The United States has expanded the role of American diplomats in collecting intelligence overseas and at the United Nations, ordering State Department personnel to gather the credit card and frequent-flyer numbers, work schedules and other personal information of foreign dignitaries.

Revealed in classified State Department cables, the directives, going back to 2008, appear to blur the traditional boundaries between statesmen and spies.

The cables give a laundry list of instructions for how State Department employees can fulfil the demands of a "National Humint Collection Directive." ("Humint" is spy-world jargon for human intelligence collection.)

One cable asks officers overseas to gather information about "office and organizational titles; names, position titles and other information on business cards; numbers of telephones, cell phones, pagers and faxes," as well as "internet and intranet 'handles', internet e-mail addresses, website identification-URLs; credit card account numbers; frequent-flyer account numbers; work schedules, and other relevant biographical information."

Philip J Crowley, a State Department spokesman, on Sunday disputed that American diplomats had assumed a new role overseas.

"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, from our country and other countries, have done for hundreds of years."

The cables, sent to embassies in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the United States mission to the United Nations, provide no evidence that American diplomats are actively trying to steal the secrets of foreign countries, work that is traditionally the preserve of spy agencies.