



# Asia-Pacific Roundtable

30 May - 1 June 2011 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



**CS 4 (b)**

## **CONCURRENT SESSION FOUR**

Tuesday, 31 May 2011

### **Wikileaks: Implications for Diplomacy and Intelligence Exchange**

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## WIKILEAKS: IMPLICATIONS FOR DIPLOMACY AND INTELLIGENCE EXCHANGE

Synopsis: The release of classified US diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks has been described as the 9-11 of diplomacy. This paper will assess the implications of the disclosures, particularly on relations and intelligence exchange between states. How have governments managed the diplomatic fallout from the leaked documents? How can governments strike a balance between sharing their assessments with other countries and the need to maintain secrecy? Has WikiLeaks significantly undermined the collection of intelligence, particularly by the United States? Is this a one-off, or should we expect such disclosures to happen frequently in the future? What will be the long-term impact of WikiLeaks on diplomacy?

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### Introduction

On 28 Nov 2010 the Guardian of UK and New York Times reported breaking news that a maverick website WikiLeaks.org had posted over 250,000 US state department cables from American diplomatic missions around the world. The two newspapers, joined by three other European publications, began a deluge of stories of secret information from the heart of the world's sole superpower. The Guardian's headline proclaimed: "US embassy cables leak sparks global diplomatic crises".

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was not amused. She roundly attacked people who used the electronic media to champion transparency, saying it was not just an attack on America's foreign policy interests..."It is an attack on the international community." The White House declared that the release of the cables was a "reckless and desperate action", and it had put lives at risk.

However European foreign ministers grasped that the leak could not be undone, and was game-changing. "It will be the 9-11 of world diplomacy," exclaimed Italy's Franco Fattilini. In the US Republican Congressmen talked of treason and proposed WikiLeaks should be designated as a "foreign terrorist organisation." New York Congressman Peter King said "WikiLeaks presents a clear and present danger to the national security of the US." Senator Joe Lieberman, Democratic chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, described the leak as "an outrageous, reckless and despicable action that will undermine the ability of our government and our partners to keep our people safe and to work together to defend our vital interests."

### State secrets

The release of the US diplomatic cables, billed as the largest set of confidential documents ever to be released into the public domain, would, it was claimed, provide an unprecedented level of scrutiny into US foreign Policy. The State Department, which had been alerted to the impending release of the cables by the New York Times, issued a condemnatory statement. It said: "We anticipate the release of what are claimed to be several hundred thousand classified state department cables...that detail private diplomatic discussions with foreign governments."

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It said field reporting to Washington, by its very nature, was candid and often incomplete information. It is not an expression of policy, nor does it always shape final policy decisions. Nevertheless those 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 around the world, it can deeply impact not only on US foreign policy interests, but those of our allies and friends around the world.”

Five months earlier, in July 2010, the Guardian, New York Times and Der Spiegel published simultaneous reports on the “Afghan War Diary”, a collection of more than 91,000 classified reports on the war in Afghanistan furnished by WikiLeaks. These documents reportedly covered the period from Jan 2004 to Dec 2009 of the war in Afghanistan. Viewed by some netizens as the “new Robin Hood” battling for greater government transparency, the actions of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange have inspired a network of likeminded supporters and activists. These included “Anonymous”, a group of pro-WikiLeaks “hacktivists” responsible for Operation Payback – a botnet campaign on service providers that have withdrawn their support for WikiLeaks. The US Attorney-General Eric Holder launched an active, ongoing criminal investigation into the leaking of classified information. He promised to hold those who broke the US law “accountable”, regardless of their citizenship. This suggested that both Julian Assange, an Australian, and Corporal Bradley Manning, an American would be charged for their roles in publishing the classified diaries and cables.

What did the world learn from WikiLeaks? Jaded westerners claimed that they learnt nothing new; that the disclosures stated the obvious and amounted to no more than “humdrum pillow talk”. There were people who argued that the cables did not reveal enough bad behaviour by Americans. There was little malfeasance in American foreign policy revealed in the documents; so where’s the justification for revealing all? They dismissed the US government’s insistence that the leaks endangered lives, helping terrorists and wrecked Washington’s abilities to do business with its allies and partners. These were not the Pentagon Papers, pro-government quarters reasoned; there was no public interest in publication.

According to the pro-WikiLeaks school these arguments missed the point – that there was hunger for the cables in countries that did not have fully functioning democracies or the sort of free expression enjoyed in London, Paris or New York. The Guardian received pleading requests from editors around the world wanting to know what the cables revealed about their own countries and rulers. It was easier to call the revelations unstartling, even dull, if one lived in western Europe rather than Belarus, Tunisia or any other oppressive regime. They said this was as powerful a case for the WikiLeaks disclosures as any.

Among the State Department cables were those that gave frank and unflattering assessments of world leaders; but also analyses, much of it good quality, as well as comments, reports of meetings, summations and gossip. There were accounts of vodka-fueled dinners, meetings with oligarchs, encounters in Chinese restaurants and even a Saudi sex party. There were essays on US-China relations or knotty problems such as Chechnya. They highlighted the geopolitical interests and preoccupations of the US superpower; nuclear proliferation; the supposed threat from Iran; the hard to control military situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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The American embassy cables came from established power centres (London, Paris) but also from far-off margins (Ashgabat; Bishkek). They offered an incomparable detailed mosaic of life and politics in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century as observed by American eyes. More importantly, argued these writers, they included disclosures of things that citizens, American and non-American – were entitled to know, such as human rights abuse, corruption and dubious financial ties between G8 leaders. They spoke of corporate espionage, dirty tricks and hidden bank accounts. In their private exchanges US diplomats dispensed with platitudes that characterise much of their public diplomacy; they gave relatively frank, unmediated assessments, offering a window into the mental processes at the top of US power.

What did the worldwide pattern of diplomatic secrets actually all mean? Some commentators saw it as proof that the US was struggling to get its way in the world, a superpower entering a long period of relative decline. Others thought the revelations at least showed the bureaucracy of the state department in a fairly good light. Historian Timothy Garton Ash confessed that he had been impressed by the professionalism of the US diplomatic corps – a hardworking and committed bunch. “For the most part what we see here is diplomats doing their proper job, finding out what is happening in places to which they are posted, working to advance their nation’s interests and their government’s policies. He summed up the value of the leaked cables thus: “It is the historian’s dream and the diplomat’s nightmare.”

### Reactions and Repercussions

How did the world react to the revelations? Some leaders brushed off the embarrassing revelations, at least in public, while others went on the attack. Iran’s president Ahamedinejad, who did not come out well in the disclosures of his regional unpopularity, dismissed the WikiLeaks data drop as “psychological warfare”. He claimed the US must have deliberately leaked its own files in a plot to discredit him. Turkey’s Prime Minister Recept Tayyip Erdogan, reacted furiously to cables that suggested he was a corrupt closet Islamist. The Russians executed a remarkable “handbrake turn”...President Medvedev at first dismissed the Russia cables as “not worthy” of comment. When it became clear that the leak was far more damaging in the long term to the US and its multilateral interests, Medvedev’s aides proposed that Julian Assange be nominated for the Nobel peace prize.

Did the Big Leak of cables change anything? It was too early to say. The short term fallout in some cases were rapid, with diplomats shuffled and officials made to take the fall eg Washington withdrew its ambassador from Libya because Gaddafi had been stung by comments concerning his voluptuous blonde Ukrainian nurse. The Ambassador in Mexico had to be recalled after the Mexican president took umbrage at his reporting of Mexico’s drug wars. The Ambassador to Tunisia was similarly withdrawn, though his unflattering reports about the president and the risks to the regime’s long-term stability proved prescient: within a month of the cable’s publication Tunisia was in the grip of what some called the first WikiLeaks revolution in Jasmine Square.

## Implications of Revelations

A study by the IISS assessed the wider implications of the disclosure of secret US cables; firstly the difficulty in deciding whether and how, in the interests of security, to share secret information among government departments. The disclosures were the price of a deliberate policy by the US to share information more widely among its officials following the terrorist attacks of 11 Sep 2001. Secondly, was the need to restore trust in its diplomacy. The signs were that it was making progress with this. Cables are still being released each day, a few at a time. However, as media interest subsides, the damage so far inflicted on US diplomatic interests across the globe may be termed moderate, it found. No major plots or scandals have been uncovered but considerable embarrassment has been caused, and in some case cases worse.

The study said the episode has undermined foreign trust in the US. Important interlocutors may in future be less inclined to speak candidly to its diplomats. American officials have been embarrassed by the public revelation of their thoughts about foreign leaders. Some of these leaders have also been discomfited, eg King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was shown to have urged Washington to attack Iran's nuclear facilities and "cut off the head of the snake." Some leaders may be endangered, eg Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Muer was reported offering advice on how Israel could defeat Hizbullah in the event of a new war.

Secretary Clinton, visiting the Middle East in Jan 2011, joked that she was on a global "apology tour" to repair the damage. She had been reaching out to leaders and others "who have concerns about either the general message of our confidential communications being exposed in this way or specific questions about their countries or themselves. That aspect of it had receded a lot. However, she added, "I have not had concerns expressed about whether any nation will not continue to work with and discuss matters of importance going forward."

## Sharing secrets securely

Still the US had chosen the risk of such leakage, as the price of a deliberate policy to distribute data more widely across government departments, introduced following the 9-11 attacks on the US in which information that could have helped to stop the terrorists was not shared. Under a post-9-11 information-sharing initiative called Net-centric Diplomacy, embassy cables were routinely distributed via SIPRNet (Secret Internet Protocol Router Network), a military internet operated by the US Department of Defence. Communications that were marked 'SIPDIS' for distribution via SIPRNet would be accessible to State Department employees worldwide, as well as to all members of the US military with "secret" security clearance. This meant that several million people had access to them.

There has always been a tension between efforts to keep classified information safe from illicit transfer or disclosure and the need for it to be available to all those whose work could benefit from access. Under the new initiative post 9-11 the Cold War principle of "need to know" gave way in Washington to the mantra "dare to share". Thus political counter-terrorist, military, technical and financial pressures all combined to impel the US government to give operational efficiency in the protection of homeland security precedence over the security of classified information.

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The expansion of the DoD's SIPRNet was a response to these pressures as was the State Department's decision to be connected to SIPRNet. This approach created risks in view of the very large number of people who had access. SIPRNet constituted an enormous bucket of information, with huge potential for leaks. Recognising this, US intelligence agencies stood aside from it and so have been only peripherally affected by the latest disclosures. It took just one lonely, low-level analyst based in Iraq, to spring the leak; he is said to have downloaded the cables on to rewriteable CDs without falling foul of SIPRNet's audit procedures. He did so even though explicit warnings had been issued of the increased risk to the integrity of the system from technological advances in storage devices.

Secretary Clinton has reportedly withdrawn the State Department from participation in SIPRNet. However such steps will do little to resolve the overall conundrum for governments in the electronic age. The problem of how best to reconcile security and efficiency appears most acute in the US because of the plethora of federal departments, agencies and state authorities that need to be linked for counter-terrorism purposes, and because of the sheer size of the federal machine and reach of US global interests.

Limited damage

The IISS study observes that the comparatively limited overall damage done to US diplomatic interests so far reflects the reality of the continuing indispensability of the US. As summed up by US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, "some governments deal with us because they fear us, some because they respect us, most because they need us." Foreign governments have long recognised the "leakiness" of Washington and that the administration cannot guarantee that information or views will be immune from unauthorised disclosure. If a government wants to preserve a message from this fate it will have to ensure it does not go on the US official record, which means passing it via the CIA. (That indirectly answers the question of the disclosure's impact on the collection of intelligence by the US).

The look behind the curtain of US diplomatic secrecy has shown that Washington's public and private agenda are closely aligned. Its diplomats are not saying things in private that are radically different from what they say in public. Meanwhile with most of the news value now apparently gone, the remainder of the downloaded cables will, if they are published, represent a bonanza for historical researchers and foreign-intelligence analysts. They will have important reference points by which to track future US diplomatic activity around the world. Over time, said former US Ambassador to Germany John Kornblum, "the longer term implications of the WikiLeaks affair will probably not be revelations of political secrets but rather the dramatic public realization of how radically the role of information has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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Another diplomatic observer, Bruce Stokes, Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the US, wrote: “With such volumes of classified information such leaks are inevitable. Also inevitable is an era of greater diplomatic transparency. That will complicate the task of those charged with making life and death international decisions. But greater sunlight in diplomacy will still deliver only an approximation of the truth. It will not change fundamental differences in interests that divide nations and lead to global disputes. Unlike the release of the Pentagon Papers in the early 1970s which fundamentally changed the way historians view the Vietnam War, WikiLeaks more resemble Hollywood gossip published by the tabloid press – titillating, immediately embarrassing, but ultimately insignificant. The only significant impact will be on the lives of those exposed and the manner diplomatic communications are carried out.”

According to the authors of WIKILEAKS the book, senior state department officials seem to have concluded by mid-January 2011 that the WikiLeaks controversy had caused little real and lasting damage to American diplomacy. Reuters reported on 19 Jan 11 that in a private briefing to Congress top US diplomats admitted the fallout from the release of thousands of private cables across the globe had not been especially bad. One congressional official briefed on the reviews told Reuters that the administration felt compelled to say publicly that the revelations had seriously damaged American interests in order to bolster legal efforts to shut down the WikiLeaks website and bring charges against the leakers. The tacit retraction of Hillary Clinton’s claim that the release of the WikiLeaks cables had been an attack on the entire international community followed the equally low-key admission that Assange did not in fact have “blood on his hands” from the release of the earlier Iraq and Afghan war logs.

The book highlights a subtle but positive outcome of WikiLeaks in Tunisia. Following the publication of leaked cables from the US mission in Tunis about the corruption and excess of the ruling family tens of thousands of protestors rose up and overthrew the country’s hated president Zine al Abdine Ben Ali. Though not quite a WikiLeaks revolution there was an extraordinary WikiLeaks effect, as reported by a young Tunisian. He described how it had turned their resigned cynicism to hope and sparked their uprising.

Secretary Clinton is said to have acknowledge that the leak of the cables had helped to repair America’s battered reputation in the Middle East, damaged by the Iraq war, and to advance the White House’s lofty goals of democratisation and modernisation. By increasing the amount of information in the system, WikiLeaks had generated unpredictable effects, claimed the authors of WIKILEAKS.

#### Historical view

Some eminent historians have taken a long view of the WikiLeaks documents and their implications for secrecy in diplomacy. Writing in Foreign Policy (Issue 185 March-April 2011) they said in the long history of the tussle between keepers of secrets and those who have sought to reveal them, those in power have tended to agree that military plans and international negotiations are best kept secret; on the other hand the likes of Julian Assange argue that secrecy is in itself bad.

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Neither side has ever definitively won; but powerful elites have lined up so consistently and effectively on the side of secrecy that calls for greater transparency have generally lost the argument. Will this round of revolt against government secrecy be snuffed out or has WikiLeaks ushered in a more lasting change? asked Margaret MacMillan, warden of St Antony's College, Oxford University, and author of *Dangerous Games: The uses and abuses of history*.

The WikiLeaks cables, she said, show that diplomacy in its essence remains much the same as in the previous centuries, with regard to secrecy of negotiations, despite calls for transparency in diplomacy. It is after all as much about the personalities and foibles of those whom diplomats encounter as about grand strategy. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century most democracies developed protocols and laws for classifying government documents and for releasing them, opting for a safe 30 years after the fact. In the age of WikiLeaks however, even these protocols begin to seem outmoded. She added: "We are getting the raw material of history right now rather than decades later. But WikiLeaks will surely have consequences. Who is going to be reckless enough to record honest opinion now?"

Another historian, Maya Jasanoff, who teaches British imperial history at Harvard University, discusses what the WikiLeaks reveal about the current state of international rivalry in the world. Reading the leaked cables there was no mistaking how much they were redolent of the closing days of the British Empire and the passing of the superpower's cape to the United States, she said. Like the despatches of British diplomats in the age of empire, these cables sketch a world of international rivalry, full of thrusting ambition and the abundance of eccentricities of things foreign. The cables abound in vivid descriptions of the lifestyle of foreign leaders and personalities which reflected on their fitness to rule. Beneath the colourful language also lurk suggestions of a darker parallel with the British Empire and the great game it waged with Russia for control of Central Asia as much as the scramble for Africa by European powers.

The cables show US diplomats mirroring imperial powers and echoing such suspicions, insecurity and ego-gratifying one-upmanship, and reprising the Great Game in Central and West Asia, as well as monitoring Chinese investment in Africa. Britain pioneered transcontinental information-gathering networks; now America of Google and Facebook worries about hackers in Russia and China. Where Britons previously received news of the empire through the filter of roving foreign correspondents and Fleet Streets newspapers WikiLeaks allows anyone with an internet connection to access the raw material of American diplomacy. She cautions however that to piece together all its eye-catching details into a meaningful narrative takes more than a browser's whim; it calls for the connective, contextualising skills of historians.

### Regional Fallout

Regional newspapers and online news portals in Southeast Asia picked up reports by Australian papers of US cables about alleged peccadilloes and corrupt practices of various officials and political leaders. The online news portal Asia Sentinel carried reports of cables on the royal family of Thailand and Indonesia's president. Reports that the Indonesian president and his acolytes had engaged in corrupt political practices and abuse of power were dismissed by his spokesmen, who questioned the veracity of those reports.



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In Bangkok reports depicting a weak Thai King and the royalty's role in the tumultuous events of 2008, as well as on the royal succession, led to an exchange of charges and counter-charges of *les majeste* between political groups. Nearer home, reports of comments by Singaporean officials to US diplomats about Malaysian political leaders generated a protest from the Malaysian Foreign Minister that the remarks were uncalled for and unjustifiable. Singapore's Foreign Minister dismissed the leaked cables as hearsay or gossip and affirmed that countries based relationships on their own interests and not hearsay or gossip.

More potentially damaging revelations were contained in a Canberra embassy report of an exchange of intelligence between officials of the US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and Australia's Office of National Assessments in October 2008. They exchanged assessments on a wide range of countries and themes, including Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, besides intelligence exchanges among US, Japan and Australia. This cable, published in full by the Asia Sentinel on 20 Jan 2011 seems to have been the exception to the rule that intelligence exchanges were to be kept out of SIPRNet.

In India the impact of the leaked cables published by The Hindu, has compounded the serial exposes of corruption which have paralysed the national parliament for several weeks. An Indian writer commented that the US diplomatic cables exposed a mendacious and venal ruling class and a head of government who has lost his moral authority. The WikiLeaks has highlighted how national democratic institutions are no defence against rapacious political elite bent on plunder of the country's resources. Some of the cables revealed US business and officials to be as embedded in India's politics as they were in Pakistan.

The WikiLeaks cables of the US state department covered the gamut of human failings and foibles that US diplomats have encountered and reported on. Whether they have added anything of value to the sum total of knowledge or understanding of the twists and turns of international diplomacy, will have to be assessed by future historians.

### Secrecy versus Transparency

Even if WikiLeaks is shut down there will be others to take its place and there will be individuals fired by missionary zeal to expose secrets who will see to leak them. A former member of the WikiLeaks team, Daniel Domscheit-Berg, is preparing to launch the OpenLeaks site to provide an untraceable digital drop-box in which would be whistleblowers can deposit their digital troves. Leading newspapers such as the Guardian and New York Times are also considering setting up their own "leak here" facilities. According to Timothy Garton Ash every government, company, university and other organisations must assume that there will be more anonymised digital leaking or digileaks.

The question for such organisations is how do you strike a balance between transparency and secrecy? Even secret services and Swiss banks now nod towards openness. But no organisation is 100% transparent. Even newspapers seek to keep secret their sources identity; so do human rights organisations on the ground that otherwise their informants might be in danger of repressive and corrupt regimes. Ash suggests two guiding principles: first, to be open about your ground for secrecy; have clear criteria which can be defended. Second, protect less but protect it better.

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He noted that there's a vast amount of stuff that governments and organisations keep secret for no good reason. Many of the reports classified as secret could easily have appeared as news analysis pieces in newspapers. So they should decide what they really need to keep secret on consistent, defensible criteria and then make sure to keep it secret. They should not upload it to a data base accessible to hundreds of thousands of people.

#### Diplomatic Confidentiality

What will be the long-term impact of WikiLeaks on diplomacy? Associate Professor Alan Chong, an academic in RSIS, has observed that the embarrassment of making public private comments by kings, presidents and ministers is symptomatic of a wider issue raised by WikiLeaks – the price of good diplomacy. That price is confidentiality. Diplomacy is fundamentally a practice of official communication between representatives of nation states. Government officials and diplomats make up the bulk of these representatives. Historically diplomacy was conducted as an exchange among elites under the assumption that sincere communication was best managed through channels of level-headed emissaries insulated from the passion of public opinion. Public pronouncements and various types of posturing, exhibited loudly by political actors or spokesmen, are a measured instrument of conveying pressure.

Confidentiality is a virtue in diplomacy because it allows candour to penetrate the sometimes dissembling behaviour of open diplomacy. In the history of diplomacy there have always been two channels: the public and the private. The former serves the needs of posturing or if a comprehensively win-win situation can be derived, the triggering of public acclaim for an arms control agreement or a peace treaty. The private channel serves to clear the air of the fog of public posturing or propagandic polemics for negotiation from the real baselines of national interest. Most successful diplomatic engagements are conducted through this duality of channels, be they for bilateral agreements or multilateral treaties.

In Asia governments appreciate confidentiality far more. Though some sceptics may argue that this is because there are too few liberal democracies to make transparency matter, it does serve to further constructive diplomacy among states that are newcomers to one another, following decolonisation some six to five decades ago. Diplomatic confidentiality kept unruly passions at bay to enable ASEAN to come into being and welcome erstwhile Cold War adversaries into its ranks. Quietly too, China, Japan and South Korea have kept a lid on territorial tensions and Pyongyang's outbursts, though back-channel communications, notwithstanding Washington's harder line on North Korea.

Thus, argued another RSIS Researcher, WikiLeaks and idealist rogues need to take note of the virtue of keeping diplomatic communication confidential. However, he acknowledged, unlike national governments WikiLeaks is not bound by the norms inherent in the conduct of foreign policy.

In order to counter the WikiLeaks effect, this writer argues, government agencies may have to reconsider the definition of “need to know”; when to know and what to know, when it comes to information sharing in the public domain. In response national governments do need to communicate the credibility of their actions in a more effective and timely manner.

Government agencies are aware of the immense potential of new media, particularly reaching out to a younger demographic across social networking sites. Nevertheless the inherent complexity of government bureaucracy often means that non-state actors such as WikiLeaks are usually one step ahead. Like a loosely organised insurgent movement, WikiLeaks often strikes “First with the Truth”, leaving government agencies scrambling to deal with the diffused aftermath. To ignore the realities of the WikiLeaks effect will further erode the credibility of national governments, he concluded.

### Conclusion

The impact of the disclosure of US state department cables by WikiLeaks has wound down from the initial outraged comparison of it to the 9-11 attacks on America to a more realistic one of embarrassment to parties concerned. It’s not all clear that they have done real harm to the US and other parties, friends or foes. Some countries and personalities have been tarnished by US embassy reports suggesting malfeasance or skulduggery, such as the alleged Mafia-FRS network of Russia. However those reports are based on hearsay or common knowledge among officials or political circles, eg India’s political corruption. Some have proved to be well founded or prescient, eg Tunisia, The cables have shown that the American diplomats are hardworking, well informed, quite reliable in their reporting and astute in assessing the situation in their host countries, eg Mexico. They are assiduous in compiling profiles of political leaders and officials to assess whether they are pro or against US interests, eg India. They tap leaders or officials of third countries for further insights or assessments of their neighbours. The cables are a trove of information or observations about countries and leaders around the world.

It can be assumed that most other countries’ diplomats do something similar, though not on the same scale, but certainly in regard to countries which are of major interest to them. Collecting information and assessing people, places, actions and events form the staple of diplomatic missions’ tasks, besides promoting exchanges, cooperation, trade and economic relations with their host countries. That aspect of diplomatic work will continue.

The US state department cables may be revealing of secret communications from and of their host countries, but they provide only one facet of a broad picture, that which has been shared with or shown to the American diplomats. That facet may not give the whole picture, which would require cross-checking with other sources or confirmation by authoritative quarters. That in turn calls for careful and discreet conversations with other diplomats or local officials or even with intelligence agencies, to put together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Often such pieces may be not available or not accessible and one has to wait for time and serendipity to provide some clues. No WikiLeaks can expose what is not shared. And such nuggets of information may not be mined if their existence is not volunteered.

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If anything the US cables have shown the need for officials and political personalities to be more discreet and circumspect in sharing their views about politics and personalities of neighbouring countries with American diplomats, if not all diplomats. The disclosures would probably result in a more cautious environment for diplomats in their interactions with local sources; the latter could well begin with a disclaimer that what they say is off the record, and certainly not for WikiLeaks!

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The Real Lesson of WikiLeaks: Virtues of Diplomatic Confidentiality – RSIS Commentaries 3 Dec 2010;

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