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Sent: Sunday, November 28, 2010 1:16 PM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: FW: Der Spiegel: A Superpower's View of the World

From: Blakeman, Chat - WWG01
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To: Mull, Stephen D; Mills, Cheryl D; Kennedy, Patrick F; Thessin, James H
Subject: FW: Der Spiegel: A Superpower's View of the World

So it begins...mostly on Germany

From: Jackson, Christine P
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SPIEGEL ONLINE

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The US Diplomatic Leaks

A Superpower's View of the World

By SPIEGEL Staff

251,000 State Department documents, many of them secret embassy reports from around the world, show how the US seeks to safeguard its influence around the world. It is nothing short of a political meltdown for US foreign policy.

What does the United States really think of German Chancellor Angela Merkel? Is she a reliable ally? Did she really make an effort to patch up relations with Washington that had been so damaged by her predecessor? At most, it was a half-hearted one.

The tone of trans-Atlantic relations may have improved, former US Ambassador to Germany William Timken wrote in a cable to the State Department at the end of 2006, but the chancellor "has not taken bold steps yet to improve the substantive content of the relationship." That is not exactly high praise.

And the verdict on German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle? His thoughts "were short on substance," wrote the current US ambassador in Berlin, Philip Murphy, in a cable. The reason, Murphy suggested, was that "Westerwelle's command of complex foreign and security policy issues still requires deepening."

Such comments are hardly friendly. But in the eyes of the American diplomatic corps, every actor is quickly categorized as a friend or foe. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia? A friend: Abdullah can't stand his neighbors in Iran and, expressing his disdain for the mullah regime, said, "there is no doubt something unstable about them." And his ally, Sheikh bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi? Also a friend. He believes "a near term conventional war with Iran is clearly preferable to the long term consequences of a nuclear armed Iran."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's emissaries also learn of a special "Iran observer" in the Azerbaijan capital of Baku who reports on a dispute that played out during a meeting of Iran's Supreme National Security Council. An enraged Revolutionary Guard Chief of Staff Mohammed Ali Jafari allegedly got into a heated argument with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and slapped him in the face because the generally conservative president had, surprisingly, advocated freedom of the press.

A Political Meltdown

Such surprises from the annals of US diplomacy will dominate the headlines in the coming days when the *New York Times*, London's *Guardian*, Paris' *Le Monde*, Madrid's *El Pais* and SPIEGEL begin shedding light on the treasure trove of secret documents from the State Department. Included are 243,270 diplomatic cables filed by US embassies to the State Department and 8,017 directives that the State Department sent to its diplomatic outposts around the world. In the coming days, the participating media will show in a series of investigative stories how America seeks to steer the world. The development is no less than a political meltdown for American foreign policy.

Never before in history has a superpower lost control of such vast amounts of such sensitive information -- data that can help paint a picture of the foundation upon which US foreign policy is built. Never before has the trust America's partners have in the country been as badly shaken. Now, their own personal views and policy recommendations have been made public -- as have America's true views of them.

For example, one can learn that German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, the Germany's most beloved politician according to public opinion polls, openly criticizes fellow cabinet member Guido Westerwelle in conversations with US diplomats, and even snitches on him. Or that Secretary of State Clinton wants her ambassadors in Moscow and Rome to inform her whether there is anything to the rumors that Italian President Silvio Berlusconi and Vladimir Putin have private business ties in addition to their close friendship -- whispers that both have vehemently denied.

America's ambassadors can be merciless in their assessments of the countries in which they are stationed. That's their job. Kenya? A swamp of flourishing corruption extending across the country. Fifteen high-ranking Kenyan officials are already banned from traveling to the United States, and almost every single sentence in the embassy reports speaks with disdain of the government of President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga.

Weighing Public Interest against Confidentiality

Turkey hardly comes away any less scathed in the cables. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the cables allege, governs with the help of a cabal of incompetent advisors. Ankara Embassy officials depict a country on a path to an Islamist future -- a future that likely won't include European Union membership.

As with the close to 92,000 documents on the war in Afghanistan at the end of July and the almost 400,000 documents on the Iraq war recently released, the State Department cables have also been leaked to the WikiLeaks

whistleblower platform -- and they presumably came from the same source. As before, WikiLeaks has provided the material to media partners to review and analyze them.

With a team of more than 50 reporters and researchers, SPIEGEL has viewed, analyzed and vetted the mass of documents. In most cases, the magazine has sought to protect the identities of the Americans' informants, unless the person who served as the informant was senior enough to be politically relevant. In some cases, the US government expressed security concerns and SPIEGEL accepted a number of such objections. In other cases, however, SPIEGEL felt the public interest in reporting the news was greater than the threat to security. Throughout our research, SPIEGEL reporters and editors weighed the public interest against the justified interest of countries in security and confidentiality.

It is now possible to view many political developments around the world through the lens of those who participated in those events. As such, our understanding of those events is deeply enriched. That alone is often enough to place transparency ahead of national regulations regarding confidentiality.

Following the leaks of military secrets from Afghanistan and Iraq, these leaks now put US diplomats on the hot seat. It is the third coup for WikiLeaks within six months, and it is one that is likely to leave Washington feeling more than a bit exposed. Around half of the cables that have been obtained aren't classified and slightly less, 40.5 percent, as classified as "confidential." 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.

Gossip and the Unvarnished Truth

Much in the material was noted and sent because those compiling the reports or their dialogue partners believed, with some certainty, that their transcripts would not be made public for the next 25 years. That may also explain why the ambassadors and emissaries from Washington were so willing to report gossip and hearsay back to State Department headquarters. One cable from the Moscow Embassy on Russian first lady Svetlana Medvedev, for example, states that she is "generating tensions between the camps and remains the subject of avid gossip." It then goes on to report that President Medvedev's wife had already drawn up a list of officials who should be made to "suffer" in their careers because they had been disloyal to Medvedev. Another reports that the wife of Azerbaijan leader Ilham Aliyev has had so much plastic surgery that it is possible to confuse her for one of her daughters from a distance, but that she can barely still move her face.

What makes the documents particularly appealing, though, is that many politicians speak the unvarnished truth, confident as they are that their musings will never be made public.

What, though, do the thousands of documents prove? Do they really show a US which has the world on a leash? Are Washington's embassies still self-contained power centers in their host countries?

In sum, probably not. In the major crisis regions, an image emerges of a superpower that can no longer truly be certain of its allies -- like in Pakistan, where the Americans are consumed by fear that the unstable nuclear power could become precisely the place where terrorists obtain dangerous nuclear material.

There are similar fears in Yemen, where the US, against its better judgement, allows itself to be instrumentalized by an unscrupulous leader. With American military aid that was intended for the fight against al-Qaida, Ali Abdullah Saleh is now able to wage his battle against enemy tribes in the northern part of the country.

Insult to Injury

Even after the fall of Saddam Hussein, it still remained a challenge for the victorious power to assert its will on Iraq. In Baghdad, which has seen a series of powerful US ambassadors -- men the international press often like to refer to as American viceroys -- it is now up to Vice President Joe Biden to make repeated visits to allied Iraqi politicians in an effort to get them to finally establish a respectable democracy. But the embassy cables make it very clear that Obama's deputy has made little headway.

Instead, the Americans are forced to endure the endless tirades of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarek, who claims to have always known that the Iraq war was the "biggest mistake ever committed" and who advised the Americans to "forget about democracy in Iraq." Once the US forces depart, Mubarak said, the best way to ensure a peaceful transition is for there to be a military coup. They are statements that add insult to injury.

On the whole, the cables from the Middle East expose the superpower's weaknesses. Washington has always viewed it as vital to its survival to secure its share of energy reserves, but the world power is often quickly reduced to becoming a plaything of diverse interests. And it is drawn into the animosities between Arabs and Israelis, Shiites and Sunnis, between Islamists and secularists, between despots and kings. Often enough, the lesson of the documents that have now been obtained, is that the Arab leaders use their friends in Washington to expand their own positions of power.

Editor's note: DER SPIEGEL's full reporting on the WikiLeaks US diplomatic cables will be published first in the German-language edition of the magazine, which will be available on Monday to subscribers and at newsstands in Germany and Europe. SPIEGEL ONLINE International will publish extended excerpts of SPIEGEL's reporting in English in a series that will launch on Monday.

URL:

- <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,731580,00.html>

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