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**From:** Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 28, 2010 1:27 PM  
**To:** Mills, Cheryl D  
**Subject:** FW: NYT stories

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**From:** Klevorick, Caitlin B  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 28, 2010 1:27 PM  
**To:** Mills, Cheryl D  
**Subject:** NYT stories

November 28, 2010

## **A Note to Readers: The Decision to Publish Diplomatic Documents**

The articles published today and in coming days are based on thousands of United States embassy cables, the daily reports from the field intended for the eyes of senior policy makers in Washington. The New York Times and a number of publications in Europe were given access to the material several weeks ago and agreed to begin publication of articles based on the cables Sunday online. 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 Source of the Material**

The documents — some 250,000 individual cables, the daily traffic between the State Department and more than 270 American diplomatic outposts around the world — were made available to The Times by a source who insisted on anonymity. They were originally obtained by [WikiLeaks](#), an organization devoted to exposing official secrets, allegedly from a disenchanted, low-level Army intelligence analyst who exploited a security loophole. Beginning Sunday, WikiLeaks intends to publish this archive on its Web site in stages, with each batch of documents related to a particular country or topic. Except for the timing of publication, the material was provided without conditions. Each news organization decided independently what to write about the cables.

### **Reporting Classified Information**

About 11,000 of the cables are marked “secret.” An additional 9,000 or so carry the label “noFORN,” meaning the information is not to be shared with representatives of other countries, and 4,000 are marked “secret/noFORN.” The rest are either marked with the less restrictive label “confidential” or are unclassified. Most were not intended for public view, at least in the near term.

The Times 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. The Times’s redactions were shared with other news organizations and communicated to WikiLeaks, in the hope that they would similarly edit the documents they planned to post online.

After its own redactions, The Times sent Obama administration officials the cables it planned to post and invited them to challenge publication of any information that, in the official view, would harm the national interest. After reviewing the cables, the officials — while making clear they condemn the publication of secret material — suggested additional redactions. The Times agreed to some, but not all. The Times is forwarding the administration's concerns to other news organizations and, at the suggestion of the State Department, to WikiLeaks itself. In all, The Times plans to post on its Web site the text of about 100 cables — some edited, some in full — that illuminate aspects of American foreign policy.

The question of dealing with classified information is rarely easy, and never to be taken lightly. Editors try to balance the value of the material to public understanding against potential dangers to the national interest. As a general rule we withhold secret information that would expose confidential sources to reprisals or that would reveal operational intelligence that might be useful to adversaries in war. We excise material that might lead terrorists to unsecured weapons material, compromise intelligence-gathering programs aimed at hostile countries, or disclose information about the capabilities of American weapons that could be helpful to an enemy.

On the other hand, we are less likely to censor candid remarks simply because they might cause a diplomatic controversy or embarrass officials.

Government officials sometimes argue — and the administration has argued in the case of these secret cables — that disclosures of confidential conversations between American diplomats and their foreign counterparts could endanger the national interest by making foreign governments more wary of cooperating with the United States in the fight against terrorists or other vital activities.

### **Providing an Analysis**

Of course, most of these documents will be made public regardless of what The Times decides. WikiLeaks has shared the entire archive of secret cables with at least four European publications, has promised country-specific documents to many other news outlets, and has said it plans to ultimately post its trove online. 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.

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. They shed light on the motivations — and, in some cases, duplicity — of allies on the receiving end of American courtship and foreign aid. They illuminate the diplomacy surrounding two current wars and several countries, like Pakistan and Yemen, where American military involvement is growing. 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.

In the coming days, editors and reporters will respond to readers on the substance of this coverage and the decision to publish. We invite questions at [askthetimes@nytimes.com](mailto:askthetimes@nytimes.com).

November 28, 2010

## **Cables Shine Light Into Secret Diplomatic Channels**

By **SCOTT SHANE** and **ANDREW W. LEHREN**

WASHINGTON — A cache of a quarter-million confidential American diplomatic cables, most of them from the past three years, provides an unprecedented look at backroom bargaining by embassies around the world, brutally candid views of foreign leaders and frank assessments of nuclear and terrorist threats.

Some of the cables, made available to The New York Times and several other news organizations, were written as recently as late February, revealing the Obama administration's exchanges over crises and conflicts. The material was originally obtained by WikiLeaks, an organization devoted to revealing secret documents. WikiLeaks intends to make the archive public on its Web site in batches, beginning Sunday.

The anticipated disclosure of the cables is already sending shudders through the diplomatic establishment, and could conceivably strain relations with some countries, influencing international affairs in ways that are impossible to predict.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and American ambassadors around the world have been contacting foreign officials in recent days to alert them to the expected disclosures. On Saturday, the State Department's legal adviser, Harold Hongju Koh, wrote to a lawyer for WikiLeaks informing the organization that the distribution of the cables was illegal and could endanger lives, disrupt military and counterterrorism operations and undermine international cooperation against nuclear proliferation and other threats.

The cables, a huge sampling of the daily traffic between the State Department and some 270 embassies and consulates, amount to a secret chronicle of the United States' relations with the world in an age of war and terrorism. Among their revelations, to be detailed in The Times in coming days:

¶ A dangerous standoff with Pakistan over nuclear fuel: Since 2007, the United States has mounted a highly secret effort, so far unsuccessful, to remove from a Pakistani research reactor highly enriched uranium that American officials fear could be diverted for use in an illicit nuclear device. In May 2009, Ambassador Anne W. Patterson reported that Pakistan was refusing to schedule a visit by American technical experts 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."

¶ Gaming out an eventual collapse of North Korea: American 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 American ambassador to Seoul. She told Washington in February that South Korean officials believe 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.

¶ Bargaining to empty the Guantánamo Bay prison: When American diplomats pressed other countries to resettle detainees, they became reluctant players in a State Department version of "Let's Make a Deal." Slovenia was told to take a prisoner if it wanted to meet with President Obama, while the island nation of Kiribati was offered incentives worth millions of dollars to take in a group of detainees, cables from diplomats recounted. The Americans, meanwhile, suggested that accepting more prisoners would be "a low-cost way for Belgium to attain prominence in Europe."

¶ Suspicions of corruption in the Afghan government: When Afghanistan's vice president visited the United Arab Emirates last year, local authorities working with the Drug Enforcement Administration discovered that he was carrying \$52 million in cash. With wry understatement, a cable from the American Embassy in Kabul called the money "a significant amount" that the official, Ahmed Zia

Massoud, “was ultimately allowed to keep without revealing the money’s origin or destination.” (Mr. Massoud denies taking any money out of Afghanistan.)

¶ A global computer hacking effort: China’s Politburo directed the intrusion into Google’s computer systems in that country, a Chinese contact told the American Embassy in Beijing in January, one cable reported. 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. They have broken into American government computers and those of Western allies, the Dalai Lama and American businesses since 2002, cables said.

¶ Mixed records against terrorism: Saudi donors remain the chief financiers of Sunni militant groups like Al Qaeda, and the tiny Persian Gulf state of Qatar, a generous host to the American military for years, was the “worst in the region” in counterterrorism efforts, according to a State Department cable last December. Qatar’s security service was “hesitant to act against known terrorists out of concern for appearing to be aligned with the U.S. and provoking reprisals,” the cable said.

¶ An intriguing alliance: American diplomats in Rome reported in 2009 on what their Italian contacts described as an extraordinarily close relationship between Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian prime minister, and Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister and business magnate, including “lavish gifts,” lucrative energy contracts and a “shadowy” Russian-speaking Italian go-between. They wrote that Mr. Berlusconi “appears increasingly to be the mouthpiece of Putin” in Europe. The diplomats also noted that while Mr. Putin enjoys supremacy over all other public figures in Russia, he is undermined by an unmanageable bureaucracy that often ignores his edicts.

¶ Arms deliveries to militants: Cables describe the United States’ failing struggle to prevent Syria from supplying arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has amassed a huge stockpile since its 2006 war with Israel. One week after President Bashar al-Assad promised a top State Department official that he would not send “new” arms to Hezbollah, the United States complained that it had information that Syria was providing increasingly sophisticated weapons to the group. ¶ Clashes with Europe over human rights: American officials sharply warned Germany in 2007 not to enforce arrest warrants for Central Intelligence Agency officers involved in a bungled operation in which an innocent German citizen with the same name as a suspected militant was mistakenly kidnapped and held for months in Afghanistan. A senior American diplomat told a German official “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 U.S.”

The 251,287 cables, first acquired by WikiLeaks, were provided to The Times by an intermediary on the condition of anonymity. Many are unclassified, and none are marked “top secret,” the government’s most secure communications status. But some 11,000 are classified “secret,” 9,000 are labeled “noforn,” shorthand for material considered too delicate to be shared with any foreign government, and 4,000 are designated both secret and nofor.

Many more cables name diplomats’ confidential sources, from foreign legislators and military officers to human rights activists and journalists, often with a warning to Washington: “Please protect” or “Strictly protect.”

The Times has withheld from articles and removed from documents it is posting online the names of some people who spoke privately to diplomats and might be at risk if they were publicly identified. The Times is also withholding some passages or entire cables whose disclosure could compromise American intelligence efforts.

## **Terrorism’s Shadow**

The cables show that nearly a decade after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the dark shadow of terrorism still dominates the United States' relations with the world. They depict the Obama administration struggling to sort out which Pakistanis are trustworthy partners against Al Qaeda, adding Australians who have disappeared in the Middle East to terrorist watch lists, and assessing whether a lurking rickshaw driver in Lahore, Pakistan, was awaiting fares or conducting surveillance of the road to the American Consulate.

They show American officials managing relations with a China on the rise and a Russia retreating from democracy. They document years of painstaking effort to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon — and of worry about a possible Israeli strike on Iran with the same goal.

Even when they recount events that are already known, the cables offer remarkable details.

For instance, it has been previously reported that the Yemeni government has sought to cover up the American role in missile strikes against the local branch of Al Qaeda. But a cable's fly-on-the-wall account of a January meeting between the Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Gen. David H. Petraeus, then the American commander in the Middle East, is nonetheless breathtaking.

"We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," Mr. Saleh said, according to the cable sent by the American ambassador, prompting Yemen's deputy prime minister to "joke that he had just 'lied' by telling Parliament" that Yemeni forces had carried out the strikes.

Mr. Saleh, who at other times resisted American counterterrorism requests, was in a lighthearted mood. The authoritarian ruler of a conservative Muslim country, Mr. Saleh complains of smuggling from nearby Djibouti, but tells General Petraeus that his concerns are drugs and weapons, not whiskey, "provided it's good whiskey."

Likewise, press reports detailed the unhappiness of the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, when he was not permitted to set up his tent in Manhattan or to visit ground zero during a United Nations session last year.

But the cables add to the tale a touch of scandal and alarm. They describe the volatile Libyan leader as rarely without the companionship of "his senior Ukrainian nurse," described as "a voluptuous blonde." They reveal that Colonel Qaddafi was so upset by his reception in New York that he balked at carrying out a promise to return dangerous enriched uranium to Russia. The American ambassador to Libya told Colonel Qaddafi's son "that the Libyan government had chosen a very dangerous venue to express its pique," a cable reported to Washington.

The cables also disclose frank comments behind closed doors. Dispatches from early this year, for instance, quote the aging monarch of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah, as speaking scathingly about the leaders of Iraq and Pakistan.

Speaking to another Iraqi official about Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, the Iraqi prime minister, King Abdullah said, "You and Iraq are in my heart, but that man is not." The king called President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan the greatest obstacle to that country's progress. "When the head is rotten," he said, "it affects the whole body."

The American ambassador to Eritrea reported last year that "Eritrean officials are ignorant or lying" in denying that they were supporting the Shabab, a militant Islamist group in Somalia. The cable then mused about which seemed more likely.

As he left Zimbabwe in 2007 after three years as ambassador, Christopher W. Dell wrote a sardonic account of Robert Mugabe, that country's aging and erratic leader. The cable called Mr. Mugabe "a brilliant tactician" but mocked "his deep ignorance on economic issues (coupled with the belief that his 18 doctorates give him the authority to suspend the laws of economics)."

The possibility that a large number of diplomatic cables might become public has been discussed in government and media circles since May. That was when, in an online chat, an Army intelligence analyst, Pfc. Bradley Manning, described having downloaded from a military computer system many classified documents, including "260,000 State Department cables from embassies and consulates all over the world." In an online discussion with Adrian Lamo, a computer hacker, Private Manning said he had delivered the cables and other documents to WikiLeaks.

Mr. Lamo reported Private Manning's disclosures to federal authorities, and Private Manning was arrested. He has been charged with illegally leaking classified information and faces a possible court-martial and, if convicted, a lengthy prison term.

In July and October, The Times, the British newspaper The Guardian and the German magazine Der Spiegel published articles based on documents about Afghanistan and Iraq. Those collections of dispatches were placed online by WikiLeaks, with selective redactions of the Afghan documents and much heavier redactions of the Iraq reports. The group has said it intends to post the documents in the current trove as well, after editing to remove the names of confidential sources and other details.

### **Fodder for Historians**

Traditionally, most diplomatic cables remain secret for decades, providing fodder for historians only when the participants are long retired or dead. The State Department's unclassified history series, entitled "Foreign Relations of the United States," has reached only the year 1972.

While an overwhelming majority of the quarter-million cables provided to The Times are from the post-9/11 era, several hundred date from 1966 to the 1990s. Some show diplomats struggling to make sense of major events whose future course they could not guess.

In a 1979 cable to Washington, Bruce Laingen, an American diplomat in Teheran, mused with a knowing tone about the Iranian revolution that had just occurred: "Perhaps the single dominant aspect of the Persian psyche is an overriding egoism," Mr. Laingen wrote, offering tips on exploiting this psyche in negotiations with the new government. Less than three months later, Mr. Laingen and his colleagues would be taken hostage by radical Iranian students, hurling the Carter administration into crisis and, perhaps, demonstrating the hazards of diplomatic hubris.

In 1989, an American diplomat in Panama City mulled over the options open to Gen. Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian leader, who was facing narcotics charges in the United States and intense domestic and international political pressure to step down. The cable called General Noriega "a master of survival"; its author appeared to have no inkling that one week later, the United States would invade Panama to unseat General Noriega and arrest him.

In 1990, an American diplomat sent an excited dispatch from Cape Town: he had just learned from a lawyer for Nelson Mandela that Mr. Mandela's 27-year imprisonment was to end. The cable conveys the momentous changes about to begin for South Africa, even as it discusses preparations for an impending visit from the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson.

The voluminous traffic of more recent years — well over half of the quarter-million cables date from 2007 or later — show American officials struggling with events whose outcomes are far from sure. To read through them is to become a global voyeur, immersed in the jawboning, inducements and penalties the United States wields in trying to have its way with a recalcitrant world.

In an era of satellites and fiber-optic links, the diplomatic cable retains the archaic name of an earlier technological era. It has long been the tool for the secretary of state to dispatch orders to the field and for ambassadors and political officers to send their analyses back to Washington.

The cables come with their own lexicon: “codel,” for a visiting Congressional delegation; “visas viper,” for a report on a person considered dangerous; “démarche,” an official message to a foreign government, often a protest or warning.

### **Diplomatic Drama**

But the drama in the cables often comes from diplomats’ narratives of meetings with foreign figures, games of diplomatic poker in which each side is sizing up the other and neither is showing all its cards.

Among the most fascinating examples recount American officials’ meetings in September 2009 and February 2010 with Ahmed Wali Karzai, the half brother of the Afghan president and a power broker in the Taliban’s home turf of Kandahar.

They describe Mr. Karzai, “dressed in a crisp white shalwar kameez,” the traditional dress of loose tunic and trousers, appearing “nervous, though eager to express his views on the international presence in Kandahar,” and trying to win over the Americans with nostalgic tales about his years running a Chicago restaurant near Wrigley Field.

But in midnarrative there is a stark alert for anyone reading the cable in Washington: “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.” (Mr. Karzai has repeatedly denied such charges.) And the cables note statements by Mr. Karzai that the Americans, informed by a steady flow of eavesdropping and agents’ reports, believe to be false.

A cable written after the February meeting coolly took note of the deceit on both sides.

Mr. Karzai “demonstrated that he will dissemble when it suits his needs,” the cable said. “He appears not 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.

### **Not all Business**

Even in places far from war zones and international crises, where the stakes for the United States are not as high, curious diplomats can turn out to be accomplished reporters, sending vivid dispatches to deepen the government’s understanding of exotic places.

In a 2006 account, a wide-eyed American diplomat describes the lavish wedding of a well-connected couple in Dagestan, in Russia’s Caucasus, where one guest is the strongman who runs the war-ravaged Russian republic of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov.

The diplomat tells of drunken guests throwing \$100 bills at child dancers, and nighttime water-scooter jaunts on the Caspian Sea.

“The dancers probably picked upwards of USD 5000 off the cobblestones,” the diplomat wrote. The host later tells him that Ramzan Kadyrov “had brought the happy couple ‘a five-kilo lump of gold’ as his wedding present.”

“After the dancing and a quick tour of the premises, Ramzan and his army drove off back to Chechnya,” the diplomat reported to Washington. “We asked why Ramzan did not spend the night in Makhachkala, and were told, ‘Ramzan never spends the night anywhere.’”

*Scott Shane reported from Washington, and Andrew W. Lehren from New York. Reporting was contributed by Jo Becker, C. J. Chivers and James Glanz from New York; Eric Lichtblau, Michael R. Gordon, David E. Sanger, Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt and Ginger Thompson from Washington; and Jane Perlez from Islamabad, Pakistan.*

## Intelligence Directives Blur Lines Between Diplomacy and Spying

By **MARK MAZZETTI**

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-flier 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 fulfill the demands of a “National Humint Collection Directive” in specific countries. (“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, cellphones, pagers and faxes,” as well as “internet and intranet ‘handles’, internet e-mail addresses, web site identification-URLs; credit card account numbers; frequent-flier account numbers; work schedules, and other relevant biographical information.”

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 the nation’s spy agencies. While the State Department has long provided information about foreign officials’ duties to the Central Intelligence Agency to help build biographical profiles, 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.

Several of the cables also asked diplomats for details about the telecommunications networks supporting the military and intelligence agencies of foreign countries.

The United States regularly puts undercover intelligence officers in foreign countries posing as diplomats, but the vast majority of diplomats are not spies. Several retired ambassadors, told about the information-gathering assignments disclosed in the cables,

expressed concern that State Department employees abroad could routinely come under suspicion of spying and find it difficult to carry out their work or even risk expulsion.

Ronald E. Neumann, a former American ambassador in Afghanistan, Algeria and Bahrain, said that Washington was constantly sending requests for voluminous information about foreign countries. But he said he was puzzled about why Foreign Service officers — who are not trained in clandestine collection methods — would be asked to gather information like credit card numbers.

“My concerns would be, first of all, whether the person could do this responsibly without getting us into trouble,” he said. “And, secondly, how much effort a person put into this at the expense of his or her regular duties.”

The requests made to State Department employees have come at a time when the nation’s spy agencies are struggling to meet the demands of two wars and a global hunt for militants. The Pentagon has also sharply expanded its intelligence work outside of war zones, sending teams of Special Operations troops to American embassies abroad to gather information about militant networks in various countries.

Unlike the thousands of cables, originally obtained by the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks, that were sent from far-flung embassies to State Department headquarters, the roughly half-dozen cables from 2008 and 2009 detailing the more aggressive intelligence collection were sent from Washington and signed by Secretaries of State Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

One of the cables, signed by Secretary Clinton, lists information gathering priorities to American staff members at the United Nations headquarters in New York, including “biographic and biometric information on ranking North Korean diplomats.”

While several international treaties prohibit spying at the United Nations, it is an open secret that countries try nevertheless. In one embarrassing episode in 2004, a British official revealed that the United States and Britain eavesdropped on the conversations of Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations in the weeks before the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The requests for more personal data about foreign officials were included in several cables requesting all manner of information from posts overseas, information that would seem to be the typical business of diplomats.

State Department officials in Asuncion, Paraguay, were asked in March 2008 about the presence of Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and Hamas in the lawless “Tri-Border” area of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. Diplomats in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo were asked in April 2009 about crop yields, rates of H.I.V. contraction and China’s quest for copper, cobalt and oil in Africa.

In a cable sent to the American Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria, in June 2009, the State Department requested information about the Bulgarian government’s efforts to crack down on money laundering and drug trafficking and for “details about personal relations between Bulgarian leaders and Russian officials or businessmen.”

And a cable sent on Oct. 31, 2008, to the embassies in Israel, Jordan, Egypt and elsewhere asked for information on “Palestinian issues,” including “Palestinian plans, intentions and efforts to influence US positions on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.” To get both sides, the State Department also sought information on “Israeli leadership intentions and strategy toward managing the US relationship.”

*Andrew W. Lehren contributed reporting from New York.*

November 28, 2010

## Around the World, Distress Over Iran

By 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.

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.”

### **The Fears of Arab States**

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 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.

### **A New Strategy**

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.

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 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."

*William J. Broad and Andrew W. Lehren contributed reporting.*

Caitlin Klevorick  
Office of the Counselor  
Department of State  
KlevorickCB@state.gov  
202.647.6115  
[redacted] (blackberry)

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