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From: sbwhoep [redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, December 1, 2010 9:20 AM
To: H
Subject: H: Les Gelb makes the points. Sid

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H:
 Les Gelb, who oversaw the writing of the Pentagon Papers, makes the points that Wikileaks show US today trying to solve difficult international problems, telling the truth and diplomats acting professionally.

WikiLeaks Accidentally Helps U.S.

by Leslie H. Gelb

November 30, 2010 | 10:42pm

Julian Assange clearly intended the State Dept. cable leaks to smear the U.S. as evil and selfish. Leslie H. Gelb on how he inadvertently proved the opposite.

The Wikileaksers dumped a vast pile of secrets to prove that the United States was selfish, stupid and wicked—but their revelations proved just the opposite. When you remove the gossip and obvious trivia that mesmerized the press, you clearly see what the Wikileaksers never expected: A United States seriously and professionally trying to solve the most dangerous problems in a frighteningly complicated world, yet lacking the power to dictate solutions. U.S. policymakers and diplomats are shown, quite accurately, doing what they are supposed to do: ferreting out critical information from foreign leaders, searching for paths to common action, and struggling with the right amount of pressure to apply on allies and adversaries. And in most cases, the villain is not Washington, but foreign leaders escaping common action with cowardice and hypocrisy.

Don't think for a New York minute that Julian Assange, the Wikileaker, unloaded this trove to save humankind. Why did he toss in those cables about Italy's leader being a rake and Germany's chancellor being a cautious fuddy-duddy, and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan being "paranoid"? To save the world? Not a chance. He did it to get attention, and he got attention from a drooling press, which then went on to call the very material they were highlighting trivial. Did Assange leak critical conversations with Chinese or Arab leaders to help solve the problems in Korea and Iran? Not by the hair on your chinny chin chin. He did it to show that he could do it—and for the attention. Anyone who is not a hopeless left-wing ideologue knows that such leaks will crush future serious conversations with those leaders for some time to come. Just think: if you told someone a serious and critical confidence about someone else, and your confidant went out and told others, would you soon repeat that mistake? Assange did not leak these cables to help solve world problems. These leaks were absolutely gratuitous and served only the purpose of making him a media marvel.

When you actually read the cables, here's what you see: American leaders and American diplomats trying to solve crucial world In explaining his deed publicly, Assange suggests that what he's doing is uncovering American misdeeds and lies. His aim, he says, is to inform citizens of democracies and peoples around the world about what their leaders are really doing. Assange also insists he did this for transparency's sake. Yet when he got to look inside, he didn't see what was plain: that our diplomats were doing a good job. Indeed, when you turn off his nonsense and stop listening to the strange commentary on cable news and even on the front pages of great newspapers, when you actually read the cables, here's what you see: American leaders and American diplomats trying to solve crucial world problems.

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—Washington needs China's help in bolstering sanctions against Iran, and China balks for fear of jeopardizing its oil and gas flow from that country. The Obama team arranges for Saudi Arabia to guarantee any loss in supply to China. If the world wants to slow or even prevent Iran's march to nuclear weaponry, this is a key path to doing so.

—The U.S. discovers that North Korea has manufactured new medium-range missiles and is trying to deliver them to Iran through China. The Obama team discovers this, informs Beijing, and asks Beijing to stop the transfer. Beijing declines. Really creepy.

—Yemen's leader takes public responsibility for American missile attacks against Al Qaeda in Yemen. He wants to diminish the power of these terrorists, as do Americans and most others in the world. The "lie" by the Yemeni president is a harmless way to get a critical job done—that is, the job of fighting international terrorism. Wikileaks tears away the political cover of Yemen's leaders.

—No country has anywhere near as much influence over nutty North Korea as China. So, U.S. diplomats are searching desperately to figure out Chinese thinking about North Korea in order to compose a plan for avoiding war on the Korean Peninsula. So, the Wikileaks expose some Chinese leaders who are actually trying to give us some insight into Chinese thinking about North Korean craziness. They won't do that again soon.

Time and again, as one actually reads these cables, one has to be heartened by the professionalism and the insights of U.S. diplomats. What are they doing? They are not lying, and U.S. leaders are not lying. They are actually, believe it or not, trying to solve problems. That seriousness of purpose and the professionalism to execute it is what jumps out at you in these materials.

So, the naïve say, it's good to show the effectiveness of our diplomats. Give me a break. Ask any American diplomat to choose between looking intelligent in leaked cables and making progress toward avoiding war.

None of this is to say that there should not be leaks, or that the press should not pursue classified information that is necessary or very helpful to a sensible public debate on policy. If a U.S. administration is lying, or distorting the facts, or telling one story to the public and another to itself, then by all means, let's have it out in public. If the U.S. government is concocting intelligence in order to justify wars, let's hope an enterprising reporter finds it out for the rest of us.

But the Wikileaks dump is not about providing essential information to Americans or to others—information they need for serious policy discussion. This massive trashing by Wikileaks of a legitimate effort by the U.S. government to preserve confidentiality is the very least a shame and at the most, a crime.

Leslie H. Gelb, a former New York Times columnist and senior government official, is author of Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy (HarperCollins 2009), a book that shows how to think about and use power in the 21st century. He is president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations.

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