



MY SAY: Let the truth be told

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People around the world were treated to a virtually unprecedented media explosion when some 250,000 classified US documents, including secret diplomatic papers, were released online once again by WikiLeaks. This was despite various warnings, in particular by some Western governments, not to do so.

Not surprisingly, many were quick to condemn the act — with some notable exceptions such as Israel — due to the raw and uncensored nature of the documents, which forced the governments to scramble for the damage-control button.

One of the main concerns is that such a release will jeopardise the security of innocent people while many others consider such an act illegal. Others call the leaks a threat to democratic sovereignty and note that the information may not be that accurate or weak.

Coming from the proponents of freedom of information and expression as well as democratic rights, such assertions have a strong sense of *déjà vu*. Iraq, for example, was unilaterally invaded on the flimsiest of excuses, exposing thousands of innocent lives to danger.

WikiLeaks in October — corroborated by Iraq Body Count, a group run by academics and peace activists — revealed that "more than 150,000 people have been killed in total since 2003, of whom 80% were civilians". This is believed to be far more than what was previously calculated.

True to what the leaked documents meant to reveal, the officials and leaders in the "coalition of the willing" seem to practise double standards — this time a willingness to support each other even when it means backing a lie. Interestingly, they do not hesitate to take different stances when they are on the offensive and when they are at the receiving end.

Thus, when it suits their purpose, as in the alleged case of the hacking of Google accounts by China, the leak is considered a "big deal". One of their responses reads: "If the hacking attack was orchestrated because a politburo member was unhappy with the information he found on Google about himself, it shows how power is being used in China; that there is no dividing line between the institutions of the state and the personal interests of the people in power."

In fact, the leak seems to show just that — there is no dividing line between "the institutions of the state" and "the personal interests of the people in power" — and it is not confined to any one country.

It has been reported that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu considered the diplomatic leak as something "positive" because the country has not been damaged by it. It also drew praises from Jonathan Powell, former British prime minister Tony Blair's chief of staff, who was fascinated to read the private (if candid) correspondence of his counterparts. Overall, the documents show that American envoys are well connected and well informed about political issues abroad.

Still others called the release of the documents the "9/11 of world diplomacy" in that everything that had once been accepted as normal had now changed. What is "normal" seems to refer to the hypocritical backroom diplomacy that is "shrouded in public by platitudes, smiles and handshakes at photo sessions", which WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange claimed led to serious "human rights abuse and other criminal behaviour" by those exposed in the documents.

Uploaded on WikiLeaks' website are documents detailing gruesome cases of prisoner abuse by Iraqi forces that the US military knew about but did not seem to investigate. The allegations shed light on what really happened behind the scenes, pouring cold water on the so-called official "truth" spewed by the conventional media.

In all, there are clear indications of selective reporting, where the "invading" forces turned a blind eye to torture and abuse of prisoners. Also documented were cases of rape and murder, including a videotaped execution of a detainee by Iraqi soldiers.

In the latest event, not unexpectedly, the US Ambassador to Germany Philip Murphy wrote to the German

Sunday weekly *Bild am Sonntag* that WikiLeaks would be an embarrassment.

"Regrettably, we will soon have something new to see — alleged confidential diplomatic messages from US embassies around the world, including mine. It's hard to say what effect it will have but it will, at the very least, be uncomfortable — for my government, for those mentioned in the reports and for me personally as American Ambassador to Germany," he wrote.

That said, what is an "embarrassment" to some may be the "hard truth" to others. It is time the "truth" was told!

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