WikiLeaks reveals the dirty diplomacy of climate change

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As the proceedings of the climate change summit concluded last weekend in Cancun, Mexico, recently released secret diplomatic cables cast renewed light on the shadowy nature of international climate change negotiations.

Underscoring the high stakes of these negotiations, a secret directive issued in July 2009 instructed US diplomats to gather intelligence on the climate-related negotiating positions and activities of key players, including Russia, China, Mexico, the European Union and the United Nations. The cable called for snatching biographic information—for example, credit card numbers, frequent flyer information, even DNA material—from international representatives as well.

Other cables reveal that intrigue is not limited to the US alone. A June 2009 transmission explains, "Evidence of an attempt to gain unauthorized entry to computer systems operated by [US Department of State] personnel involved with climate issues has surfaced. Though the incident has not been attributed to any known hostile actor, the event appears to be a targeted spear-phishing attempt and may be indicative of efforts to gather intelligence on the US's position on climate change issues."

Far from the lofty public calls for coordinated international action, the cables offer a glimpse of the vicious struggle for national advantages and protection of domestic corporate interests. For example, Saudi Arabia's government, a leaked cable from February 12, 2010, explains, has been severely critical of any and all climate agreements, fearing the increased "economic costs associated with 'demonizing' oil." On the other hand, Saudi officials express regret that they hadn't thought of "something clever, like India or China," that would allow them to score funding for technology while not committing to anything legally enforceable.

China, for its part, was cited in a cable calling for the US to lift restrictions on its high-tech exports—a measure that would further strengthen the country's manufacturing base. The US maintains the restrictions in order to ensure maximum profitability for American-based patent-holders.

Both China and the US have come into conflict with the European Union countries, which in general pushed for a more aggressive approach, including legally binding emission reduction targets. A cable relaying discussions with Australian diplomats notes the increasingly "comfortable" relationship between the US and China, and consequently, growing doubt that the EU's favored approach would win out.

Just like China and the US, the European negotiating position is in the end determined fully by the profit interests of its corporate and financial elite. The EU's new climate commissioner and lead negotiator, Connie Hedegaard, is openly speaking for such powerful interests. The *Financial Times* noted a recent shift in rhetoric reflecting this reality, remarking that at a recent conference, "Hedegaard skipped past the usual European reasons—moral responsibility, survival of humanity—and homed in on another: European business."

The incompatibility of the various 'national interests' with the needs of humanity as a whole was on full display during the Copenhagen climate meetings last December—the subject of several of the released cables. The Copenhagen session ended in debacle, with the expectations of a legally binding treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol left shattered. In its place was a non-binding, three-page statement known as the Copenhagen Accord, which consisted primarily of voluntary emission targets and vague promises for funding climate adaptation projects and technology

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transfer in impoverished nations.

The accord initially garnered little support. The US, the primary author, led a diplomatic offensive to bribe or blackmail others into signing on, the cables reveal. The dominant tactic emerging from the leaks is one of linking support for the accord with development aid to poor countries. In a meeting with the Indian Ocean island nation of the Maldives, for example, US climate change envoy Jonathan Pershing tied $50 million in bilateral assistance and congressional appropriations for the Maldives to its support for the Copenhagen Accord. Likewise, a cable summarizing a meeting with Ethiopian government tells a similar story: support for the Accord was a precondition for further discussion.

In its methods the US is not unique. As a January 2010 cable reported, "The Dutch government is taking steps to convince developing countries to 'associate with' the Accord. [Dutch climate negotiator Sanne] Kaasjager has drafted messages for embassies in capitals receiving Dutch development assistance to solicit support. This is an unprecedented move for the Dutch government, which traditionally recoils at any suggestion to use aid money as political leverage."

Shortly after the meeting with the Dutch, dozens of US and EU officials discussed how to manage those governments still holding out. "Hedegaard responded that we will need to work around unhelpful countries such as Venezuela or Bolivia. [US Deputy National Security Advisor Michael] Froman agreed that we will need to neutralize, co-opt or marginalize these and others such as Nicaragua, Cuba, Ecuador." Pablo Solon, a Bolivian official, explained what happened next: "One thing that I can say for sure is they cut aid to Bolivia and to Ecuador. That is a fact. And they said it very clearly: 'We're going to cut it, because you don't support the Copenhagen Accord.' And that is blackmail."

Ultimately, the US succeeded in its goal of gathering 100-150 countries in support of the accord. Despite this apparent diplomatic success, the leaked cables also reveal the vacuous nature of the entire agreement. Referring to the provision to 'fast track' $30 billion in funding to developing nations, Hedegaard, in discussions with US envoy Pershing raised the question of the US using "creative accounting" to meet the commitment, rather than providing actual increases in funding levels. Along similar lines, the cable relaying conversations with Dutch officials referred to "areas of friction with developing countries on financing: most of the pledged funding is not "additional"…and much of it is already committed without much say from recipients."

As for likelihood of nations keeping to their emission targets under the voluntary Copenhagen Accord—and even the legally binding Kyoto Protocol—the human intelligence directive cable is symptomatic of widespread skepticism throughout the world. The cable directs US diplomats to collect evidence of "treaty circumvention" related to climate change.

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