

WikiLeaks and secret diplomacy

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As diplomatic cables obtained by WikiLeaks continue to be published—revealing each day new information on the sordid maneuvers of American imperialism in various parts of the world—the US government is going on the offensive. It is leading an international campaign targeting WikiLeaks founder Jullian Assange and the organization's web site.

To justify the witch-hunt against WikiLeaks, which has not committed any crime, innumerable government officials and media commentators have come to the defense of secret diplomacy, declaring the practice of conducting negotiations, hatching plots and making deals behind the backs of the people a positive virtue and even a bulwark of peace and democracy.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been among the most vocal in denouncing WikiLeaks, declaring that the publication of thousands of cables “is an attack on the international community, the alliances and partnerships, the conventions and negotiations that safeguard global security and advance economic prosperity.”

What is the actual content of these “negotiations that safeguard global security”? The WikiLeaks documents—only a small fraction of which have as yet been made public—provide a glimpse of the nexus of corrupt relations and criminal operations carried out in secret by the US government.

One telling example, reported in the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday, is a conversation between Clinton and then-Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in March of 2009. Clinton complained of the difficulty of the US taking action to curb China's growing influence, given China's stockpile of nearly \$2 trillion in dollar-denominated assets. “How do you deal toughly with your banker?” she asked.

Rudd emphasized that while he hoped China could be integrated into the framework of a US-dominated Asia-Pacific region, it was necessary for the US and its allies

to prepare “to deploy force if everything goes wrong.”

A war between the US and China would trigger a global catastrophe. The very fact that it is discussed as an option is indicative of the militarist conspiracies being hatched in the course of Washington's secret diplomacy.

In the past few months, the US has sharply escalated its provocations against China, in parallel with its demands for China to revalue its currency. Clinton herself last month cited a US-Japanese military pact when discussing the dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

More and more, global relations resemble the periods that led up to World War I and World War II, with the United States at the center of increasingly unstable conflicts. Building on the bloody wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—which have killed hundreds of thousands—the US is preparing new provocations. Global tensions are rising in the wake of the capitalist crisis. The interests of the major powers in all corners of the globe threaten to turn innumerable local conflicts in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East into global conflagrations between nuclear-armed states.

In considering the question of diplomatic secrecy, it is worth recalling the attitude taken by the US government in an earlier period. In the aftermath of the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed in 1918 an era of open diplomacy.

In announcing his Fourteen Points, he declared, “It will be our wish and purpose that the processes of peace, when they are begun, shall be absolutely open and that they shall involve and permit henceforth no secret understandings of any kind. The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by; so is also the day of secret covenants entered into in the interest of particular governments and likely at some unlooked-for moment to upset the peace of the world.”

The first of the Fourteen Points—which Wilson put

forward as the proposed basis for a post-war settlement—was a call for “open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but *diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.*” [Emphasis added].

Wilson’s pacifism and call for open diplomacy were thoroughly hypocritical, motivated by US attempts to undermine the position of its competitors in Europe. As the rising imperialist power, American capitalism could benefit from breaking down the old colonial and inter-state structures established under the domination of England.

The Fourteen Points, moreover, were aimed at refurbishing capitalism in the wake of the catastrophic war and the Russian Revolution. The revolutionary government led by Lenin and Trotsky quickly published all the secret treaties in its possession, documenting the imperialist carve-up of the world that had produced the war and the drive for territories, markets and resources that comprised the real war aims of all the warring powers.

Nevertheless, the call for open diplomacy was an acknowledgement of the broadly held view that secret negotiations and treaties constituted a permanent threat to world peace. They violated basic conceptions of democracy, as they removed foreign policy from all public oversight and control.

It is precisely this secrecy that the United States is now so determined to safeguard. As the strength of American capitalism has declined, the component of its foreign policy infused with lies, criminality and imperialist intrigue has increased. The US is now engaged in perpetual wars of plunder and is constantly planning for the next war.

American policy depends crucially on secrecy and lies precisely because it is in such irreconcilable conflict with the interests of the people of the United States and the world. It is notable that the official reaction to the latest batch of WikiLeaks documents is even more hysterical than the response to the previous exposures of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. The release of the State Department cables has potentially destabilizing implications for US policy in every part of the globe.

The virtually unanimous defense of secret diplomacy and condemnation of WikiLeaks among liberals as well

as conservatives is an expression of the disintegration of any democratic consciousness within the ruling elite, including the media. During the period of Watergate and the Pentagon Papers, sections of the media considered it their job to expose the secret agreements and operations of the government to public view. Today, the various pundits and commentators do not bat an eye when it is suggested that the American government should assassinate Assange.

WikiLeaks has done the world’s population a great service in helping to bring these secret negotiations to light. The revelations strengthen the hand of the working class as it enters into struggle against the policies of the corporate and financial elite.

The vicious reaction of world powers to the revelations, however, serve to demonstrate that an end to imperialist intrigue and war can come only through the overthrow of the capitalist social relations that give rise to them.

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