

WikiLeaks exposes Washington's dollar diplomacy

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Secret cables obtained and revealed by WikiLeaks expose the ugly alliance between State Department diplomats and major US corporations to advance their interests in every corner of the world.

Only around 1 percent of the 250,000 leaked cables have so far been made publicly available by WikiLeaks, and the cables obtained by WikiLeaks do not constitute the most highly sensitive of US diplomatic communications. At the same time, the cables reveal countless day-to-day instances of the US State Department acting at the behest of US corporations.

In cables revealed by WikiLeaks, the interests of US corporations are treated as though they are identical to the interests of the US government. Behind closed doors, US corporate agents and diplomats work together as a team: the corporation's economic clout is welded to the unspoken threat of involvement by the US government and military. WikiLeaks has performed a valuable service to working people in the US and around the world by dragging this nefarious combination, long kept hidden, into broad daylight.

According to leaked cables, in early 2010 a draft law in Russia's Duma, or lower house of parliament, threatened to "disadvantage" US credit card companies MasterCard and Visa. Among other things, the law would have taken steps toward creating a National Payment Card System (NPCS) that would prevent MasterCard and Visa from collecting as much as US\$4 billion in credit card fees annually.

A February 1, 2010 cable from the Moscow Embassy, marked "confidential," describes the draft law as well as conversations between US diplomats and MasterCard and Visa agents. Apparently, Russian officials believed that MasterCard and Visa were

making their Russian records available to US intelligence agencies. The cable's author, Matthias Mitman, a US diplomat specializing in economic affairs, requested that the Obama administration take immediate action.

"This draft law continues to disadvantage U.S. payment card market leaders Visa and MasterCard," Mitman wrote. "We recommend that senior USG [United States government] officials also take advantage of meetings with their Russian counterparts, including through the Bilateral Presidential Commission, to press the GOR [government of Russia] to change the draft text to ensure U.S. payment companies are not adversely affected." In other words, high-level officials in the Obama administration—perhaps even Obama himself—were encouraged to take the issue up directly with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

Mitman remarked that US diplomats "will continue to raise our concerns with senior GOR officials." In plain English, this means that US diplomats—employees of the US government, whose salaries are paid by taxation of the American population—were meeting with Russian officials to use their position and influence to ensure that MasterCard and Visa would be able to collect billions in credit card fees in that country.

MasterCard and Visa announced in December 2010 that they would no longer be processing any donations to WikiLeaks.

"Dollar diplomacy" is by no means limited to Russia. In Central and South America, US imperialism's historical "backyard," WikiLeaks has exposed the same noxious combination of government and business.

A series of cables from late 2008 reveal a partnership between the US embassy in Panama and the Bechtel Corporation to place a winning bid on a Panama Canal

Authority construction contract. Apparently, the US embassy viewed its mission as securing the profits of Bechtel. The embassy reported back to Washington that it “will continue to monitor the process, to advocate for Bechtel, and to promote U.S. based content.” (Bechtel eventually lost the bid to a Spanish company.)

In July 2008, the US ambassador to Ecuador conducted what amounts to “collections” work for US businesses, pressing the government of Ecuador to make additional payments it allegedly owed to Machala Power, a subsidiary of US electricity company Noble Energy.

In March 2005, the US ambassador to Brazil facilitated “participation of U.S. firms in commercial space launches at the Alcantara facility in northern Brazil.”

In August 2008, Forbes Energy executives met with the US ambassador to Haiti “regarding the company’s planned USD 700 million sugarcane ethanol project straddling the Dominican Republic-Haiti border.”

A series of 2009 cables from the US embassy in Nigeria, the most populous African country, document the stranglehold exerted by Shell Oil together with the US State Department: together they blocked legislation that threatened to cut across Shell Oil profits, removed Nigerian officials that stood in their way, and paid for the installation of friendly agents at all levels of the Nigerian government. (See “WikiLeaks documents show Shell Oil domination of Nigeria“)

Embassies have to a certain extent always been used to facilitate business between two countries. However, the ongoing WikiLeaks publications reveal a staggering escalation of this behavior. During a period of an intensifying government offensive against the working class in the US, the goal of securing international corporate and banking profits was elevated to one of the highest priorities of the State Department. As more cables are released, this phenomenon will be further exposed.



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