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Hillary Rodham Clinton

Press Conference on WikiLeaks Release of Confidential Documents

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I want to take a moment to discuss the recent news reports of classified documents that were illegally provided from United States Government computers. In my conversations with counterparts from around the world over the past few days, and in my meeting earlier today with Foreign Minister Davutoglu of Turkey, I have had very productive discussions on this issue.

The United States strongly condemns the illegal disclosure of classified information. It puts people's lives in danger, threatens our national security, and undermines our efforts to work with other countries to solve shared problems. This Administration is advancing a robust foreign policy that is focused on advancing America's national interests and leading the world in solving the most complex challenges of our time, from fixing the global economy, to thwarting international terrorism, to stopping the spread of catastrophic weapons, to advancing human rights and universal values. In every country and in every region of the world, we are working with partners to pursue these aims.

So let's be clear: this disclosure is not just an attack on America's foreign policy interests. It is an attack on the international community -- the alliances and partnerships, the conversations and negotiations, that safeguard global security and advance economic prosperity.



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I am confident that the partnerships that the Obama Administration has worked so hard to build will withstand this challenge. The President and I have made these partnerships a priority -- and we are proud of the progress that they have helped achieve -- and they will remain at the center of our efforts.

I will not comment on or confirm what are alleged to be stolen State Department cables. But I can say that the United States deeply regrets the disclosure of any information that was intended to be confidential, including private discussions between counterparts or our diplomats' personal assessments and observations. I want to make clear that our official foreign policy is not set through these messages, but here in Washington. Our policy is a matter of public record, as reflected in our statements and our actions around the world.

I would also add that to the American people and to our friends and partners, I want you to know that we are taking aggressive steps to hold responsible those who stole this information. I have directed that specific actions be taken at the State Department, in addition to new security safeguards at the Department of Defense and elsewhere to protect State Department information so that this kind of breach cannot and does not ever happen again.

Relations between governments aren't the only concern created by the publication of this material. U.S. diplomats meet with local human rights workers, journalists, religious leaders, and others outside of governments who offer their own candid insights. These conversations also depend on trust and confidence. For example, if an anti-corruption activist shares information about official misconduct, or a social worker passes along documentation of sexual violence, revealing that person's identity could have serious repercussions: imprisonment, torture, even death.

So whatever are the motives in disseminating these documents, it is clear that releasing them poses real risks to real people, and often to the very people who have dedicated their own lives to protecting others.

Now, I am aware that some may mistakenly applaud those responsible, so I want to set the record straight: There is nothing laudable about endangering innocent people, and there is nothing brave about sabotaging the peaceful relations between nations on which our common security depends.



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There have been examples in history in which official conduct has been made public in the name of exposing wrongdoings or misdeeds. This is not one of those cases. In contrast, what is being put on display in this cache of documents is the fact that American diplomats are doing the work we expect them to do. They are helping identify and prevent conflicts before they start. They are working hard every day to solve serious practical problems -- to secure dangerous materials, to fight international crime, to assist human rights defenders, to restore our alliances, to ensure global economic stability. This is the role that America plays in the world. This is the role our diplomats play in serving America. And it should make every one of us proud.

The work of our diplomats doesn't just benefit Americans, but also billions of others around the globe. In addition to endangering particular individuals, disclosures like these tear at the fabric of the proper function of responsible government.

People of good faith understand the need for sensitive diplomatic communications, both to protect the national interest and the global common interest. Every country, including the United States, must be able to have candid conversations about the people and nations with whom they deal. And every country, including the United States, must be able to have honest, private dialogue with other countries about issues of common concern. I know that diplomats around the world share this view -- but this is not unique to diplomacy. In almost every profession -- whether it's law or journalism, finance or medicine or academia or running a small business -- people rely on confidential communications to do their jobs. We count on the space of trust that confidentiality provides. When someone breaches that trust, we are all worse off for it. And so despite some of the rhetoric we've heard these past few days, confidential communications do not run counter to the public interest. They are fundamental to our ability to serve the public interest.

In America, we welcome genuine debates about pressing questions of public policy. We have elections about them. That is one of the greatest strengths of our democracy. It is part of who we are and it is a priority for this Administration. But stealing confidential documents and then releasing them without regard for the consequences does not serve the public good, and it is not the way to engage in a healthy debate.

In the past few days, I have spoken with many of my counterparts around the world, and we have all agreed that we will continue to focus on the issues and tasks at hand. In that spirit, President Obama and I remain committed to productive cooperation with our partners as we seek to build a better, more prosperous world for all.



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Thank you, and I'd be glad to take a few questions.

Mr. Crowley: We'll begin with Charlie Wolfson of CBS in his last week here covering the State Department.

Secretary Clinton: Where are you going, Charlie?

Q: I'll [inaudible] into the sunset, but let me get to a question.

Secretary Clinton: Yes, sir.

Q: Madam Secretary, are you embarrassed by these leaks personally, professionally? And what harm have the leaks done to the U.S. so far that you can determine from talking to your colleagues?

Secretary Clinton: Well, Charlie, as I said in my statement, and based on the many conversations that I've had with my counterparts, I am confident that the partnerships and relationships that we have built in this Administration will withstand this challenge.

The President and I have made these partnerships a priority, a real centerpiece of our foreign policy, and we're proud of the progress that we have made over the last 22 months.

Every single day, U.S. Government representatives from the entire government, not just from the State Department, engage with hundreds if not thousands of government representatives and members of civil society from around the world. They carry out the goals and the interests and the values of the United States. And it is imperative that we have candid reporting from those who are in the field working with their counterparts in order to inform our decision-making back here in Washington.

I can tell you that in my conversations, at least one of my counterparts said to me, "Well, don't worry about it. You should see what we say about you." So I think that this is well understood in the diplomatic community as part of the give-and-take. And I would hope that we will be able to move beyond this and back to the business of working together on behalf of our common goals.

Mr. Crowley: Kim Ghattas of BBC.

Secretary Clinton: Kim.



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Q: Madam Secretary, I was wondering whether you could tell us what you think your upcoming trip is going to look like. Presumably, a lot of the people who have been mentioned in those alleged cables are going to have conversations with you. Do you think it's going to cause you discomfort over the coming week as you engage in conversations with those leaders?

And I know you don't want to comment on the particulars of the cables, but one issue that has been brought up into the daylight is the debate about Iran. What do you think the impact is going to be of those documents on the debate about Iran in the coming weeks and months?

Secretary Clinton: Well, Kim, you're right. And I don't know if you're going on this trip or not, but we will be seeing dozens of my counterparts in Astana, and then as I go on from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and then ending up in Bahrain for the Manama dialogue. And I will continue the conversations that I have started with some in person and over the phone over the last days, and I will seek out others because I want personally to impress upon them the importance that I place on the kind of open, productive discussions that we have had to date and my intention to continue working closely with them.

Obviously, this is a matter of great concern, because we don't want anyone in any of the countries that could be affected by these alleged leaks here to have any doubts about our intentions and our about commitments. That's why I stressed in my remarks that policy is made in Washington.

The President and I have been very clear about our goals and objectives in dealing with the full range of global challenges that we face. And we will continue to be so and we will continue to look for every opportunity to work with our friends and partners and allies around the world and to deal in a very clear-eyed way with those with whom we have differences, which of course brings me to Iran.

I think that it should not be a surprise to anyone that Iran is a source of great concern not only in the United States, that what comes through in every meeting that I have anywhere in the world is a concern about Iranian actions and intentions. So if anything, any of the comments that are being reported on allegedly from the cables confirm the fact that Iran poses a very serious threat in the eyes of many of her neighbors, and a serious concern far beyond her region.



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That is why the international community came together to pass the strongest possible sanctions against Iran. It did not happen because the United States went out and said, "Please do this for us." It happened because countries, once they evaluated the evidence concerning Iran's actions and intentions, reached the same conclusion that the United States reached – that we must do whatever we can to muster the international community to take action to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state.

So if anyone reading the stories about these alleged cables thinks carefully, what they will conclude is that the concern about Iran is well founded, widely shared, and will continue to be at the source of the policy that we pursue with likeminded nations to try to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.