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Research Paper

Diplomacy Facing the Revolution of “Transparent Society” and “Risk Society”

WikiLeaks: international and regional ramifications

Dr. Hichem al-Karoui

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Contents

<i>DIPLOMACY FACING THE REVOLUTION OF “TRANSPARENT SOCIETY” AND “RISK SOCIETY”</i>	
<i>ABSTRACT:</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>THE RISK SOCIETY</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>THE TRANSPARENT SOCIETY</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>THE INTERNET REVOLUTION</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>DIPLOMACY</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IN THE FACE OF TRANSPARENCY AND RISK</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>OBAMA AND THE PROBLEM OF SECRECY</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>THE FACTORS AFFECTING US DIPLOMACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>REGIONAL REPERCUSSIONS</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>EFFECTS ON REGIMES AND DOMESTIC POLICIES</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS</i>	<i>25</i>

Abstract:

Contrary to the assumption that the leaks of the diplomatic cables represented a heavy and unexpected pressure on American diplomacy – through their exposition of a mode of operation based on hypocrisy and duplicity – I will try to prove that the leaks, in fact, signify greater challenges and pressures to the states of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), as in all the countries that witnessed a popular revolt, Internet played an informing, mobilizing and organizing role. I will show that the publication of secret documents may have more of an effect on regional relations within the Middle East than on bilateral relations between the countries of this region and the United States, with information contained in the documents likely to prompt some states to reassess their relations with others in the region.

Methodology: I will examine this hypothesis through a theoretical framework based on the concepts of the “transparent society” and the “risk society” applying them on the diplomatic field, with a focus on certain examples that appear noteworthy in light of recent social and political events in the Middle East. I will thus examine whether a connection exists between the open source of the Internet and the events taking place in some countries, and discuss the American role in the region, as well as the anticipated developments and changes in diplomatic relations in light of these events.

Introduction and definitions

The WikiLeaks phenomenon could not have happened in a place where “transparency” is not a paramount motto and a code of conduct. The event took place in the democratic countries, and despite that, official reactions warned of the potential threats and suggested a tradeoff between the security of citizens and society on the one hand, and sacrificing transparency on the other.¹ This logic meant that societies were presented with a false dichotomy, forcing them to choose between preserving security and/or maintaining transparency.² However, the intensifying events in the Middle East, which have created maelstroms in the face of autocratic regimes, are a refutation of the claim that security could be maintained without transparency. Because these

¹ The Europeans criticized the official US reaction to Wikileaks revelations, describing it as arrogant and hypocritical, and complaining that the Obama administration took no legal action to attempt to stop the publication of the documents. For an example of this debate, see:

Steven Erlanger, “In Europe, sharp criticism of US reaction to WikiLeaks,” *New York Time*, December 10, 2010.

http://www.boston.com/business/technology/articles/2010/12/10/in_europe_sharp_criticism_of_us_reaction_to_wikileaks/

² Some of the statements of US officials can be read in the following article:

Bridget Johnson, “How Washington Reacted to WikiLeaks” :

<http://worldnews.about.com/od/unitedstates/qt/How-Washington-Reacted-To-Wikileaks.htm>

leaks touched on diplomacy, transparency and fear of security threats are not only a concern of local communities, but also of the regional regimes and the world order that dominates the international society. I will begin by defining key concepts in order to avoid misinterpretations. These key terms are: risk society, transparent society, epoch revolution, and diplomacy.

The risk society

I adopt the concept of Ulrich Beck about the transition from an industrial/class society to a risk society, which characterizes our time. For Beck, the risk society, “designates a developmental phase of modern society in which social, political, economic and individual risks tend to escape the institutions for monitoring and protection in society.”³ This transitional period exhibits visible threats, such as the destruction of the environment, with the effects of pollution being perceptible in forests, mountains, and oceans. The same effects can be observed in the degradation of archaeological and artistic monuments, as well as other disasters regularly reported by the media.⁴ Add to this a long list of toxic materials and pollutants present in foods and other goods we use daily, as well as the lies and scandals surrounding them, to the point that Beck speaks of a “secret alliance between a rigid scientism and dangers that threaten humanity, which were permitted or favored by this very scientism”⁵. This is due to the fact that the history of sciences is, in Beck’s view, “a history of errors ... more so than a history of the progress of knowledge”⁶. Fortunately, however, the risk society is also a society of questioning and self-criticism.

We see the same phenomena in social life, for threats affect the individual as they do the family: unemployment, for instance, is no longer “the fate of a class or the fate of marginal groups, but has become widespread and routine”.⁷ Relations between males and females even within the same family have turned aggressive and vulnerable due to the pressures of the work market and the needs of the consumerist society, which is evidenced by the increase in the occurrence of divorce. “Due to their dependency upon institutions, individual conditions became vulnerable to crises,”⁸ Beck argues, and we saw “a generalized lack of job security”⁹; “the educational system

³ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage Publications, 1992, p.5

⁴ The most recent of which being the “triple whammy” experienced by Japan in March 2011, when an earthquake and a tsunami were followed by explosions in nuclear reactors, exposing local inhabitants to the threat of radiation.

⁵ As Beck writes in German, I refer here to the French translation of his **Risk Society**, Ulrich Beck, **La Société du Risque**, (Paris, Flammarion, 2001), p113.

⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Ibid* p.348

⁷ *Ibid*, p.200

⁸ *Ibid* p.287

has lost its role in distributing social functions: it is no longer sufficient for someone to obtain degrees in order to attain a specific professional position”¹⁰. This has caused education to lose its authority, which is evidenced by the rise in incidents of violence against teachers. Beck concludes that “the project of rational liberation, which was heralded by modernity, has not been achieved yet.”¹¹ Under such conditions, can diplomacy remain removed from understanding the events taking place, when “threats have become global”, with many of the factors described above being among the motivators of the revolutionary eruption in several parts of the Arab world?

In reality, all governments benefit, to varying extents, from a climate of perpetual threat. Beck warns of “the rise of a regulative policy for the state of exception, which benefits from the presence of a threat situation to grant itself wide interventionist powers and prerogatives. In every place where danger is routinized, this state of exception takes a permanent institutional form”.¹² The problem is that the state of exception could become the normal state in the risk society, which Beck also dubs “the catastrophe society”.

The transparent society

In the streets of major cities, in public and private establishments, and in public spaces we live under the watchful eye of video cameras and surveillance satellites. We can no longer limit the number of databases holding information on our lives, habits, tendencies, beliefs, and personal histories. At the same time, attempts to protect the citizen – as well as corporations – using modern technology abound; these include encoding and protection software designed to preserve online privacy and protect one’s identity. If we add to these the regulations that protect privacy and guarantee citizens the opportunity to hold governments and officials accountable, we realize that transparency goes in both directions – or, at least, that is the ideal in democratic societies. Despite the fact that conditions differ in societies that lack democracy, the open source phenomenon is capable of hastening awareness of such necessities while speeding the movement of history. This is what has been taking place in the Arab world since the Tunisian Revolution. This was the opinion expressed by numerous thinkers who believe that “technology is a

⁹ Ibid, p.304

¹⁰ Ibid, p.326. It is noteworthy that the unintended “fuse” of the revolution in Tunisia, Muhammad al-Bouazizi, is a perfect representative of this social stratum whose members graduated from colleges or universities but found no places in the job market. These were at the front of the protestors in Tunisia and Egypt and other places, where demands began as social ones before they turned political

¹¹ Ibid p.346

¹² Ibid, p.142. All Arab governmental reactions to the protests demanding social rights and political reforms was to resort to the state of exception ... without exception

potentially crucial element in the defense of liberties in the future;”¹³ which signifies that there is no escape from transparency.

The Internet revolution

Truly, any effort to explore the concept of the transparent society must begin with an acknowledgment of the Internet as “the greatest revolution of all ages”¹⁴, and that it has clearly hastened the steps of change in an unprecedented manner, allowing us to face the future right now – instead of waiting for it to happen.¹⁵ The initial issue around which the Internet system was based is “thinking about the unthinkable”; i.e. considering the possibility of a nuclear war and devising a trans-continental communications system that could survive such a war. Planning for the future in order to control it in a scientific manner was inevitably leading to a revolution in communications and information, followed by a revolution in awareness and behavior towards the concepts of the old authority – with the Internet undermining the hierarchical organization of power. The main concept of the Internet is to distribute command over the virtual web rather than concentrate it in one location, which could be damaged in the event of a nuclear disaster, for instance. The basic model also implies that the network cannot be circumscribed or suppressed, for it will always find ways to avoid censorship. What we are currently witnessing is that the Internet has allowed disparate groups of individuals to become closer, coalesce, and form currents, counter-currents, and new balances within communities and across communities. Many of these groups are laboring to institute the concept of transparency in public life while resisting the authority of despotic governments in ways that were unimaginable in the past. It was inevitable that this revolution would affect international relations and its main vessel: diplomacy.

¹³ David Brin, **The Transparent Society**, (Addison-Wesley, Reading Massachusetts, 1998) p.21

¹⁴ Brin, op. Cit., p.35

¹⁵ It should be noted in this regard that after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions the official position of American diplomacy moved towards the launching of an initiative to support opposition activists, human rights advocates and other civil society forces suffering from the control of despots over the Internet. This could be seen as an acknowledgment of the role of the Internet in democratic transition; more than USD 30 million was devoted to funding technologies that help Internet users in these countries circumvent censorship and detection. See:

Mark Landler, “U.S. Policy to Address Internet Freedom,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/15/world/15clinton.html?_r=1&hpw

Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, speech at George Washington University, February 15, 2011: “Internet Rights and Wrongs: Choices & Challenges in a Networked World” :

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/156619.htm>

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is defined as “the process of representation and negotiation due to which states usually deal with each other in times of peace.”¹⁶ Effective diplomacy heralds and is based on a set of political, psychological, economic, and military tools in the possession of the state. Technically, diplomacy could be defined as “the act of communication between governments.”¹⁷

If the above were the context of diplomatic action, it would be difficult to find a direct or indirect link between local events and the diplomatic mission; when such an event takes place, it is considered an exception that could lead to a crisis and the rupture of relations. Therefore, we can understand the extent of anger and fear that the publication of the WikiLeaks cables has stirred in diplomatic and official circles. From this perspective as well, talk spread of threats surrounding diplomats and relations between the countries in question, in addition to their relationships with the United States. The problem here was not so much legal as ethical, which comes as no surprise, since many of the codes regulating relations between governments are more related to ethics than to legal texts.

There is no law that can regulate all the happenings in a society, the acquired habits, the polite conversation, and the exchange of ideas between people in different occasions. There is no doubt of the existence of international ethics that are manifested in a number of principles agreed upon by numerous states. “The United Nations Charter, for instance, reflects an international morality in many of its articles”¹⁸, including calls for the respect of human rights and basic freedoms with no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, language, or religion. Moral and ethical rules that have not been codified into laws tend to be more opaque and subject to varying interpretations. In this regard, I note that those who act on behalf of the state are prone to consider it as an objective in and of itself,¹⁹ with “a tendency among governments, as with individuals, to claim the universality of the moral principles that they hold.”²⁰

Diplomacy, which was allowed this calm demarche for a long period, today finds itself forced to adapt to new necessities, with the communications revolution and the deep changes it has induced in societies and among elites. Diplomacy is forced to assimilate the idea that our age features two elements that did not have the same momentous presence in the past: risk and transparency. It must be stressed that diplomacy and transparency are like fire and water; if diplomatic missions were meant to be transparent, we would not have diplomatic immunity and

¹⁶ Norman J. Padelford/George A. Lincoln, **The Dynamics of International Politics**, (The Macmillan Company- Collier-Macmillan Limited, New York, London, 1967): 314.

¹⁷ Padelford/Lincoln, *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁸ Vernon Van Dyke, **International Politics**, (Appleton-Century-Crofts, INC. New York, 1957) 308.

¹⁹ Van Dyke, *op. Cit.*, p.306

²⁰ Van Dyke, *op. Cit.*, p.309

other laws that protect diplomats, bar the authorities from searching them, and maintain the secrecy of their communications. This in itself makes WikiLeaks' publication of the US diplomatic cables an unprecedented blow whose ramifications could change the nature of diplomacy, or at least some of its tools. However, there is nothing to prove that this blow was directed against American diplomacy in particular, since it is supported domestically and protected in foreign lands by myriad laws and customs; no one believes that the revelation of the names of American diplomats mentioned in the cables will lead to their prosecution over what they wrote. On the other hand, events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, etc. show that a time of reckoning has come, which was not incited by WikiLeaks, but WikiLeaks, social media, and the Internet in general had a role in this eruption, as I will demonstrate below.

American diplomacy in the face of transparency and risk

It is noteworthy that the US government has presented itself, from day one, as the main victim of the diplomatic leaks. While some spoke of a veritable "diplomatic disaster", the US administration, which was aware of WikiLeaks' possession of the large stock of diplomatic documents for some time, did not do more than inform Congress and a few concerned foreign governments of the imminent publication of the documents. The US State Department was content to send a letter to Julian Assange, the founder of the website, warning that "the publication will endanger counter-terrorism operations and will pose a threat to the relations of the United States with its allies".²¹ In fact, if the US government wanted to change Arab regimes, or pressure and embarrass them, it would have found no better way than to publish the statements of Arab and Muslim officials to US diplomats, and the American analysis and comments on their statements – which is exactly what WikiLeaks did.

Until very recently, there was a widely held belief among American politicians that, in order to preserve security and stability in the Middle East and North Africa, transparency and democracy must be sacrificed. That remained the state of affairs for many years until the events of September 11, 2001 took place, and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice admitted, in a 2005 speech in Cairo, that: "for sixty years the United States sought to maintain stability at the

²¹ US warns WikiLeaks against leak," Al-Jazeera, 28 Nov 2010:

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2010/11/20101127171228200116.html>

expense of democracy in the Middle East, and we achieved neither. Today, we have adopted a new direction, we support the democratic aspirations of all peoples.”²²

It became clear for US diplomacy that real stability can only be built upon democracy. Therefore transparency, which is the first criterion of any democracy, serves stability when it expresses the will of the people. It was left for the American government to prove the credibility of this new discourse, but the policy of former President George W. Bush failed to do so. The occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq in order to expel the Taliban and Saddam Hussein looked more like fulfillment of American strategic considerations than a response to the demands of the Afghan and Iraqi peoples. Furthermore, foreign military intervention, whose original purpose may have been the deposing of a despotic ruler, ended up reshuffling the cards and producing a new situation in which the political elite collaborating with the Americans was accused of opposing the people and working for its own interests under the umbrella of the United States. As a result, the neo-conservative discourse calling for the democratization of the Middle East – even by force – was received in the region as an expression of new imperialism under the slogan of “democracy for all”.

Most noteworthy in this specific case were the neglect of transparency and the stressing of risks to induce fear. The Americans invaded Iraq due to those two factors: they linked Saddam’s alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, which they knew did not exist (lack of transparency) with the potentiality of him striking an alliance with Al-Qaeda to attack America (risk-mongering). In other words, the Bush administration excluded transparency while stirring fears of risks.

The new Democratic president, Barack Obama, entered the White House in January 2009, and shortly thereafter, on June 4, he delivered a speech in Cairo in which he attempted to win the Arabs over to his vision, and to stir optimism regarding what this longtime activist would do to US foreign policy, especially in regard to the Palestinian cause. However, in matters relating to the struggle of Arab civil society for human rights and basic freedoms, Obama stuck to generalities, or at least that was the opinion of the Middle East director for Human Rights Watch.²³ In fact, Obama did mention the importance of democracy and the fact that it represents a point of tension between his country and Muslim states, but he did not name specific countries, nor

²² Remarks of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice At the American University of Cairo, Monday, June 20, 2005: <http://www.arabist.net/blog/2005/6/20/condoleezza-rices-remarks-from-her-cairo-speech-at-auc.html>

²³ US/Egypt: Obama Dodged Rights Issue Generalities Failed to Send Tough Message on Mideast Repression: <http://www.arabist.net/blog/2009/6/6/human-spin-watch.html>

was it expected that he would point to countries like Egypt, Tunisia or Syria or others as human rights violators while he was being hosted by an Arab country.

Obama and the problem of secrecy

On his first day in the White House, January 21, 2009, President Obama issued two memorandums to “the heads of executive departments and agencies” relating to transparency within the government. The first memorandum focused on the management of the Freedom of Information Act, while the second discussed transparency and open government. On December 6, 2009, the White House’s Office of Management and Budget issued a third memorandum (Executive Order 13526) aimed at bestowing a practical meaning on the notions of transparency, public participation, and cooperation.²⁴ These pre-emptive measures, however, did not prevent what was to take place, or keep the Obama administration from appearing to be in a state of bafflement and nervousness as the WikiLeaks website began publishing thousands of secret documents that were not supposed to be accessed by the public.

In the months following the issuing of the third memorandum, numerous events took place that stirred Congress, public opinion and the media, renewing the debate on the confidentiality of government information.²⁵

- **Shamai Leibowitz**, a former contractor for the FBI, was sentenced to prison for leaking classified information to a blog.²⁶
- On its website, WikiLeaks published more than 600,000 confidential government and diplomatic documents, some of which related to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, while others involved various political issues. The Obama administration condemned this unprecedented leak of classified information.²⁷

²⁴ (Wendy R. Ginsberg, The Obama Administration’s Open Government Initiative: Issues for Congress, CRS Report for Congress, August 17, 2010).

²⁵ Kevin R. Kosar, Classified Information Policy and Executive Order 13526, CRS Report for Congress, December 10, 2010.

²⁶ Maria Gold, “Former FBI Employee Sentenced for Leaking Classified Papers,” May 25, 2010, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/24/AR2010052403795.html>

²⁷ White House Office of the Press Secretary, “Statement by the Press Secretary,” November 28, 2010, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/28/statement-press-secretary>; and White House Office of the Press Secretary, “Statement of National Security Advisor General James Jones on Wikileaks,” July 25, 2010, at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-national-security-advisor-general-james-jones-wikileaks>.

- On August 6, 2010, a memorandum confirmed that the US Department of Defense had purchased the entire first edition of a book with the purpose of destroying all the copies; the book was written by one of its former employees, and it was said to contain secret information relating to military and intelligence operations in Afghanistan.²⁸
- According to John Goldsmith, a former assistant to the attorney general, high-level government officials have leaked highly classified information to journalist Bob Woodward.²⁹

Despite all that, the Obama administration stood by as it watched WikiLeaks publish the secret diplomatic cables. After the public condemnation, the publication took place and the administration was somehow embarrassed, but then the moments of discomfort passed and the matter became routine – except in the Middle East, where we saw exceptional happenings.

The factors affecting US diplomacy in the Middle East

When reading the cables, one can glean the tendencies in American thinking on some major issues – not the official public line, which we receive through the media, but the undisclosed and unpublicized thinking, which is usually the real basis upon which policymakers formulate their positions and decisions. However, in the documents we find nothing that can be considered harmful to US diplomacy and interests, except for some embarrassment and discomfort. The following are some examples found among the cables:

- 1- The possibility of increasing tensions in Turkey's relations with Israel, Iran and the United States, with the cables presenting a negative assessment of Turkey's regional policy:

In a cable from Ankara, dated October 27, 2009,³⁰ US Ambassador James Jeffrey opines, based on sources within and outside Turkey, that the deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations

²⁸ Scott Shane, "Secrets in Plain Sight in Censored Book's Reprint," *New York Times*, September 17, 2010, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/18/us/18book.html>; and Ronald L. Burgess, Lieutenant General, Defense Intelligence Agency, "Harm to National Security from Unauthorized Disclosure of Classified Information by U.S. Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Anthony Shaffer in His Book 'Operation Dark Heart,'" memorandum, August 6, 2010, at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/news/2010/09/dia080610.html>. See also Steven Aftergood, "Pentagon Delays Publication of New Book," *SecrecyNews.org*, September 15, 2010, at http://www.fas.org/blog/secrecy/2010/09/dark_heart.html

²⁹ Jack Goldsmith, "Our Nation's Secrets, Stuck in a Broken System," *Washington Post*, October 22, 2010, at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/21/AR2010102104848.html>

is mainly because Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an Islamic fundamentalist and “simply hates Israel”, which also partially explains the shift in the Turkish position vis-à-vis Tehran.

In another cable from Ankara, dated November 3, 2009,³¹ Jeffrey said that Erdogan’s latest statements regarding the Iranian nuclear program represent “a defense of Tehran’s defiance of the will of the international community”. He added that “we will stress to the senior officials ... as well as to President [Abdullah] Gul that they have an interest in reining in Erdogan.”

2- Evidence emerged of an American inclination to integrate Iraq within the Gulf security framework, as well as the promotion of the image of Iraq as a democracy dominated by the Shia which poses a serious challenge to the regimes in the region:

In a two-part cable from Baghdad dated September 24, 2009³², Ambassador Christopher Hill discusses the relations between Iraq and its neighbors. He writes that the United States must re-engineer the security system of the Gulf Cooperation Council to fully assimilate Iraq as it develops tools to contain Iranian influence in the region. The new place occupied by Iraq will be shaped in a manner that takes into account the interests of the United States as well as its Gulf allies. The biggest challenge, according to Hill, was in convincing the Sunni Arab governments that a strong, stable, democratic Iraq, which would necessarily be led by the Shia, is the best guarantee against Iranian actions, if the future of Iraq is to be linked to its moderate Arab neighbors and the West. These revelations include nothing that would contradict, or negatively affect, American interests.

3- The previous point contradicts the vision of the Iraqi leadership, which believes that some neighbors “are fearful of the success of Iraq in a democratic political process that combines the aspirations of the Sunnis and the Shias in an unprecedented manner”. We do not know how such concerns can dovetail with the American efforts to inject Iraq into the Gulf security system.

³⁰ Israeli Ambassador Traces His Problems To Erdogan:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/10/09ANKARA1549.html>

³¹ Working Erdogan Back Into The Fold On Iran :

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/11/09ANKARA1583.html>

³² The Great Game, In Mesopotamia: Iraq And Its Neighbors, Part I:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/09/09BAGHDAD2562.html><http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/09/09BAGHDAD2562.html>

- 4- What Ambassador Hill says in this regard may affect Iraq's relationship with its Gulf neighbors negatively, but it is not clear that it will also affect US interests. In the second part of the same cable,³³ the ambassador expands on his idea, arguing that a Shia-led democratic regime in Iraq could become a model that undermines the legitimacy of autocratic regimes in the region, and that this helps to explain why some neighbors prefer a weak and unstable Iraqi regime. Hill reiterates what he was told by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, to the effect that some neighbors "are fearful of the success of Iraq in a democratic political process that combines the aspirations of the Sunnis and the Shias in an unprecedented manner". The ambassador also quotes analyses he heard from Iraqis claiming that, for Sunni Arab neighbors, the success of Iraqi democracy would signify "the end of Sunni political power", which could only be retrieved after a period of violence and instability in Iraq that would undermine the legitimacy of the democratic regime and the Shia as political leaders.
- 5- These statements are just dangerous concerning their effect on relations between neighbors, and the revelation makes it even graver, for we cannot predict all the reactions that such statements might induce in the short and long terms. The question is: does this opinion really reflect the thinking of Iraqi officials? If the answer is yes, then we can see the amount of mistrust between these officials and their Arab neighbors, as well as the deep impact of sectarian feelings on politics, while the presumption is that the growth of sectarian allegiances goes against national belonging, in addition to its contravention of the notion of democracy. In the democratic world, nobody is elected on the basis of his sectarian belonging rather than his political programs.
- 6- If we hypothesize that the leaks represent a dangerous turn for diplomatic history in general, and for American diplomacy in particular, we would find that the response to these leaks divided the American political scene into two camps:
 - The conservatives considered the WikiLeaks affair to be no less than an attack against the rights of free sovereign nations in managing their foreign policies and directing their diplomacy in a manner serving the interests of a more secure world. That was the opinion of Helle C. Dale,³⁴ a researcher at the Heritage Foundation, who argued that "U.S. national security and ability to be a global leader has suffered as a consequence". The author noted four potential repercussions:

³³ The Great Game, In Mesopotamia: Iraq And Its Neighbors, Part II:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/09/09BAGHDAD2561.html>

³⁴ Helle Dale, The End of Diplomacy As We Know It, the Heritage Foundation, December 2nd, 2010.

<http://blog.heritage.org/?p=47561>

- “(1) Foreign governments cooperating with the United States, including several in the [Arab](#) world, have been severely compromised, with direct national security implications;
- (2) foreign leaders who are treated with less than respect in U.S. cable traffic, such as Italian Prime Minister Silvio [Berlusconi](#) or Germany’s Angela [Merkel](#), will not be thrilled—and very possibly their publics won’t like it either;
- (3) communications between U.S. diplomats will be less candid as public disclosure is a possibility anytime; and
- (4) the U.S. will find it harder to act as a world leader.”

However, all those risks mentioned by the author do not represent evidence that American national security is threatened, unlike the case with Middle East regimes.

- Liberals, on the other hand, are best represented in the United States by the *New York Times* newspaper, which wrote in one of its editorials³⁵ that even if there are “legitimate reasons for keeping many diplomatic conversations secret ... [t]he claim by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the leaks threaten national security seems exaggerated. The documents are valuable because they illuminate American policy in a way that Americans and others deserve to see.” Others within the US State Department believe that the leaks “are embarrassing, but not damaging”³⁶, and that official pronouncements to the contrary aim at supporting the legal efforts to close down the WikiLeaks website and prosecute its owners.
- There is another position that combines the two opinions above, and which was expressed by Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists.³⁷ He argues that WikiLeaks, while employing the same practices as other groups working for the spread of transparency, open government, and fighting corruption, was exceptionally treated with contempt. Aftergood finds no good explanation for the refusal of the Knight Foundation³⁸ to support the project when a request was made, since the Foundation is engaged in funding progressive initiatives related to the First

³⁵ WikiLeaks and the Diplomats,” Editorial, The New York Times, November 29, 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/opinion/30tue1.html>

³⁶ Mark Hosenball, “US officials privately say WikiLeaks damage limited,” January 18, 2011, Reuters.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/18/wikileaks-damage-idUSN1816319120110118>

³⁷ Steven Aftergood, “Wikileaks Fails “Due Diligence” Review,” Secrecy News, June 28, 2010.

http://www.fas.org/blog/secrecy/2010/06/wikileaks_review.html

³⁸ <http://www.knightfdn.org/>

Amendment and freedom of the media. In Aftergood's opinion, "WikiLeaks is a creative response to a real problem afflicting the U.S. and many other countries, namely the over-control of government information to the detriment of public policy."³⁹ Aftergood adds that while some may view WikiLeaks, which presents itself as fighting censorship, as a traditional liberal organization committed to enlightened democratic values, a closer look reveals this not to be the case. Aftergood believes that "WikiLeaks must be counted among the enemies of open society because it does not respect the rule of law nor does it honor the rights of individuals."

Regional repercussions

By analyzing many of the cables, it becomes clear that the negative effects touching upon regional relations are more serious than those affecting bilateral relations with the United States. Here are a few examples and comments:

Iran and the Arabs in the WikiLeaks cables

The most notable instances in this regard were:

- 1- Some cables implied that the allies of the United States in the Middle East are strongly supportive of action against Iran's nuclear efforts, maybe even military action, and that confidence between the Arabs and the Iranians has completely deteriorated. Also revealed were suspicions on the part of Gulf states over the capacity of the West in reaching an agreement with Iran on the nuclear issue, and expectations of war.
- 2- Iran's becoming a nuclear power is considered as a red line that cannot be crossed, with doubts even regarding Israel's ability to halt the Iranian nuclear program.
- 3- The main key for containing Iran is the achievement of advances on the Palestinian-Israeli front.
- 4- The existence of a veritable cold war between Iran and the Arabs.
- 5- The acceleration of the arms race in the Gulf in anticipation of what Iran's obduracy might cause.
- 6- The possibility of the United States' reaching an agreement with Iran "behind the Arabs' back" is not excluded.
- 7- There are strong evidences of the tensing up of relations between Iran and Iraq.

In the following are some examples:

³⁹ http://www.fas.org/blog/secretcy/2010/06/wikileaks_review.html

In a cable from Doha dated December 12, 2009,⁴⁰ Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron describes a meeting he held, along with Assistant Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman, with a senior Qatari official who described his country's relationship with Iran thus: "they lie to us and we lie to them". The ambassador adds, quoting the senior official, that Qatar has doubts regarding the West's reaching an agreement with Iran on the nuclear issue, and that he has advised the Iranians to listen to the Western proposal. If no agreement is reached, "war will burst out soon, if not by an American decision, then by an Israeli one."

In a cable from Abu Dhabi,⁴¹ dated July 7, 2009, Ambassador Richard Olson describes a meeting that he attended, in the company of Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner, with officials in the Emirati government. During the meeting, the Emiratis "expressed serious concern over Iran's regional intentions and pleaded for the U.S. to shorten its decision-making timeline and develop a "plan B." They also encouraged the United States to send Iran a message to the effect that there are red lines concerning the nuclear issue "with direct consequences for transgressions". The Emirati officials "pointed to a nuclear Iran as an existential threat to the UAE" to the point where they viewed "a near term conventional war with Iran as clearly preferable to the long term consequences of a nuclear armed Iran," with all that would involve in terms of Iranian regional hegemony and its exploitation of differences between Sunni and Shia Arabs in order to create further instability. Emirati officials expected Israel to attack Iran if the United States were to delay such an action. And they believed that Iran would respond with a missile counter-attack that could also hit their country, in addition to a series of terrorist operations around the world. Despite that, UAE officials seemed skeptical regarding Israel's ability to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore there is a need for planning. It is noticeable that the Emiratis were careful to remind the Americans that "the key to containing Iran revolves around progress in the Israel/Palestine issue" and that "it will be essential to bring Arab public opinion on board in any conflict with Iran", which will not happen without the hastening of the "two-state solution over the objections of the Netanyahu government."

In a cable from Cairo⁴² dated April 30, 2009, Ambassador Margaret Scobey describes a meeting with Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman that was attended by the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen. During the meeting, Suleiman affirmed that Egypt had begun confronting Hezbollah and Iran and that "it had already begun recruiting agents

⁴⁰ On Iran: They Lie To Us; We Lie To Them:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/12/09DOHA728.html>

⁴¹ Alarm On Iran :

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/07/09ABUDHABI736.html>

⁴² Admiral Mullen's Meeting With EGIS Chief Soliman:
<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/04/09CAIRO746.html>

in Iraq and Syria” in preparation to interfere in Iran if the latter interfered in Egypt. Suleiman expressed his hope that the United States would not follow the European path in negotiating with Iran, warning against focusing on a single issue. He also affirmed that Iran must “pay the price” for its actions, and that it should not remain unleashed in the region. In light of this cable, we may understand why Washington held onto Suleiman as a potential successor to President Hosni Mubarak once the Egyptian people began calling for latter’s resignation. Washington needed continuity in Egyptian foreign policy in order to coordinate with it on the regional level.

In a cable from Beirut⁴³ dated April 16, 2008, Charge d’Affaires Michele Sison quotes a Lebanese minister as saying that “Iran Telecom” has begun expanding its network in order to “control Lebanon”, that his ministry has discovered a complete fiber-optic system established by Hezbollah in Lebanon, and that all Arab officials concerned with Lebanese affairs, including the Arab League, have been informed of the matter and supplied with maps showing the extent of the network and its coverage. The Lebanese minister believes that the Christian areas have been targeted, even though Hezbollah was quick to deny that, claiming that the network was established to serve as a defense communications network for Lebanon. However, the main sponsor of this network is Iran, which makes it a “strategic victory”, allowing Iran to establish “a bridgehead in Lebanon that bypasses Syria”. The Lebanese government informed its allies and friends of the discovery of the network in preparation for its taking counter-measures.

In a cable from Jeddah⁴⁴ dated September 11, 2009, Consul General Martin R. Quinn spoke of a meeting grouping President Obama’s advisor, John Brennan, with a senior Saudi official, in which the latter affirmed that “over the past two years Iran has hosted Saudis (all Sunnis) ... who had contacts with terrorists and worked against the Kingdom”. The Saudi official said this breached the security treaty signed between the two countries in 2001, and emphasized that these events were taking place despite all of the kingdom’s efforts to clear the air with Iran, especially after the 1996 Khobar attack.

In another cable from Riyadh, dated December 16, 2006, Ambassador James C. Oberwetter wrote about a meeting between Frances Fragos Townsend⁴⁵, Obama’s Homeland Security adviser, and some Saudi princes and officials; the discussion included the sanctions imposed on Iran and Iran’s reaction. While the US official expressed concern regarding terrorist attacks on oil installations, the Saudis appeared confident of their ability to protect their facilities from

⁴³ Lebanon: Hizballah Goes Fiber Optic:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2008/04/08BEIRUT523.html>

⁴⁴ Presidential Assistant Brennan’s Sept 5 Discussion :

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/09/09JEDDAH343.html>

⁴⁵ Meeting between Frances Fragos Townsend with some Saudi princes and officials

<http://wikileaks.tetalab.org/mobile/cables/06RIYADH9095.html>

terrorist attacks. But they placed a greater importance on the threat of Iran launching Scud missiles against the oil platforms in Ras al-Tannura and al-Jubail, and perhaps also against US bases in Qatar and Bahrain, which would elicit a Saudi reaction. “The more dangerous threat (..) is a SCUD missile launch from Iran (..)The Iranians would target Saudi facilities at Ras Tanura and Jubail, also perhaps the US bases in Qatar and Bahrain, which would cause the Saudis to be involved as well.” The Saudis believe that they will be a target for Iran once sanctions against the latter are tightened, they have insinuated that they prefer to be at full military readiness not excluding a “war outbreak through a pre-emptive strike against Iran.”

In a cable also from Riyadh⁴⁶, dated January 28, 2009, a highly placed Saudi official in the Foreign Ministry told a group of diplomats that the kingdom does not want to see the Americans reaching a deal with Iran at the expense of the region’s Arab countries, and that “if Iran tries to produce nuclear weapons, other countries in the Gulf region would be compelled to do the same, or to permit the stationing of nuclear weapons in the Gulf to serve as a deterrent to the Iranians”. In this regard, we should recall confirmed reports claiming that Arabs are preparing – in coordination with the United States – for a nuclear-armed Iran, and some say that the region is a candidate for dramatic nuclear proliferation. For example, we read in the National Journal⁴⁷ that the Obama administration is negotiating with Saudi Arabia over a commercial agreement for the development of nuclear energy, which includes no mention of non-proliferation clauses, meaning that the door could be open for Saudi Arabia to develop nuclear arms.

In a Baghdad cable⁴⁸ dated January 11, 2011, a US diplomat detailed a meeting that grouped Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi with a delegation from the US Congress. During the meeting, Abd al-Mahdi said that Iraq “cannot risk its future and enter into a new conflict with Iran”, and that issues relating to the two countries’ long border required a calm resolution. Talabani affirmed that the Iraqis “do not recognize the 1975 treaty between the two countries since it was effectuated under the Saddam regime” and because it has led to many problems. Iran also knows, according to the Iraqi interlocutors, that its influence over Iraq today is not as powerful as it imagines it to be.

⁴⁶ Saudi Exchange With Russian Ambassador On Iran's Nuclear Plans:

<http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/01/09RIYADH181.html>

⁴⁷ Elaine M. Grossman, “Obama Team Eyes Saudi Nuclear Trade Deal Without Nonproliferation Terms” National Journal, January 25, 2011.

<http://nationaljournal.com/obama-team-eyes-saudi-nuclear-trade-deal-without-nonproliferation-terms-20110125?page=1>

⁴⁸ President And Vice President Discuss Iran-Iraq Border Dispute, Elections, And Security:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2010/01/10BAGHDAD70.html>

In another Baghdad cable⁴⁹ dated September 24, 2009, Prime Minister al-Maliki told Ambassador Hill that “Iran was trying to destabilize Iraq” through its constant interventions in the political process in Iraq, with the aim of controlling the Parliament. Maliki also claimed that “Iran has not discarded use of military means to attain its objectives”, even though it still focuses on political means. If Iran could not affect the results of the 2010 elections, he expected that it would revert to military tools. Maliki believes that what Iran is doing, above all, is an effort to combat Saudi Arabia’s efforts to mobilize the Sunnis to its side.

In a cable also originating from Baghdad⁵⁰ on September 24, 2010, Ambassador Hill wrote that even though the Iraqi government believes that it can maintain control regarding its relationship with Iran, America’s “allies in the region – see the situation in far starker terms and fear that Iraq could fall into Iran’s political orbit and be rendered unable to speak or act independently, once U.S. troops draw down.”

As we can see, these cables contain no embarrassing revelations about the United States, while they completely de-mask the Arab position.

Turkey and the Arabs through WikiLeaks

The second example, relating to relations with Turkey, can be summarized as follows:

- 1- The existence of a gulf between the Turkish and Arab positions regarding the Iranian nuclear issue
- 2- The presence of doubts regarding Turkish foreign policy under Erdogan, including what might affect “the continuity of constructive positions towards Iraq”, and issues of Turkish rapprochement with Syria and Iran, as well as what is termed “neo-Ottomanism”
- 3- Linkage between Turkish regional political ambitions and fundamentalist Islam, which might hamper the development of secular Arab democracies.
- 4- The rise of a belief that the new Turkish role bothers everybody – the Arabs, the Europeans, and the Americans – despite the varying assessments
- 5- The need of the Arab media to link official Turkish foreign policy positions to the requirements of the political scene in Turkey in order to understand their full significance.

⁴⁹ Prime Minister Accuses Iran Of Trying To Destabilize Iraq:
<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/09/09BAGHDAD2569.html>

⁵⁰ The Great Game, In Mesopotamia: Iraq And Its Neighbors, Part I:
<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/09/09BAGHDAD2562.html>

I offer a few examples:

In an Ankara cable⁵¹ dated November 3, 2009, US Ambassador to Ankara James Jeffrey spoke of a meeting with the Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary, Feridun Sinirlioglu, in which the American inquired about statements made by Erdogan in Tehran denying that Iran harbors ambitions of nuclear armament, warning that “Washington was now wondering if it could any longer count on Turkey to help contain Iran’s profound challenge to regional peace and stability.” The Ambassador stated that Turkish President Gul had a different stance, affirming that Turkey is against nuclear proliferation in the region and that it wants Iran to be transparent in that regard in order to ease suspicions.

In another cable from Ankara⁵², dated January 20, 2010, US Ambassador to Ankara James Jeffrey discusses in detail “what lies beneath Turkey’s new foreign policy”. He claims that “Turkish policy today is a mix of ‘traditional Western’ orientation, attitudes and interests, and two new elements, linked with new operational philosophies: ‘zero conflicts’ and ‘neo-Ottomanism.’ The traditional still represents the core of Turkish foreign policy, and is centered on cooperation and integration with the West.” He affirms that Turkey under Erdogan has attempted to fulfill the “zero conflicts” principle by attempting to resolve all standing issues with neighboring states. However, the instability in Iraq and the lack of willingness among Iraqi Kurds to do more against the PKK “raise questions about the sustainability of Turkey’s constructive Iraq policy”. Rapprochement with Syria did not result in Damascus moving away from Tehran; and as for “neo-Ottomanism”, the ambassador sees it as an accusation made by Turkish politicians of the “traditional Western” persuasion against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), since it insists on having “a unique understanding of the region”. But Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was quick to adopt the accusation, rather than deny it.

Jeffrey discusses a seminal speech delivered by Davutoglu in Sarajevo in late 2009, opining that the speech contained the essence of the political philosophy guiding Turkish foreign policy. Davutoglu’s proposition was as follows: “the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East were all better off when under Ottoman control or influence; peace and progress prevailed. Alas the region has been ravaged by division and war ever since.” Jeffrey adds: “While this speech was given in the Balkans, most of its impact is in the Middle East. Davutoglu’s theory is that most of the regimes there are both undemocratic and illegitimate. Turkey, building on the alleged admiration among Middle Eastern populations for its economic success and power, and willing to stand up for the interests of the people, reaches over the regimes to the ‘Arab street.’ Turkey’s

⁵¹ Working Erdogan Back Into The Fold On Iran:
<http://cablegategame.com/cable/09ANKARA1583>

⁵² What Lies Beneath Ankara's New Foreign Policy:
<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10ANKARA87.html>

excoriating the Israelis over Gaza, culminating in the insulting treatment of President [Shimon] Peres by Erdogan at Davos in 2009, illustrates this trend. To capitalize on its rapport with the people, and supposed diplomatic expertise and Ottoman experience, Turkey has thrown itself into a half-dozen conflicts as a mediator.” Those include Iraq, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. Jeffrey does not see this policy as having produced results, but rather, frictions with US foreign policy, in addition to Europe, which is concerned by Turkish actions. Jeffrey believes this new foreign policy to be useful only for the AKP and the electoral base of its leaders, adding that even if the Arab street responded well to this radical populist discourse, Arab rulers would find little to admire in it.

This cable reveals something not noted by the Arab media that showered unlimited praise on Erdogan, which is that Turkey now possesses new objectives in the Middle East: it seeks to affect the domestic and regional policies of the region countries, and it also has an organic link to fundamentalist Islam. Even though the American ambassador perceives Arab leaders to be the ones negatively affected by Turkey’s maneuver as it attempted to bypass them and communicate with their populations directly, this could also be the position of some democratic, sectarian, leftist, and liberal movements in Arab civil society, which may view Turkey’s interferences as unproductive one-upmanship that only serves to strengthen the fundamentalists and religious conservatives in general, at the expense of secular, liberal, and leftist movements. Indeed, it is difficult to find in, for example, Erdogan’s support of Ahmadinejad anything more than a blank check presented to the Iranian nuclear program that could be transformed into an armament program with the support of Turkey. And this is what the Arabs reject in the same manner in which they reject Israel’s maintenance of a similar program alongside an arsenal of nuclear weapons. Aside from that, the support for Ahmadinejad is offered to a dictatorial regime, which the Iranian people have revolted against numerous times, especially after the 2009 elections whose transparency was doubted by Iranians as well as foreign observers. This policy is in clear contradiction to many Turkish commitments made to the Americans, especially the claim that Turkey seeks to drive Syria outside the Iranian orbit.

It is strange that Ambassador Jeffrey almost bought into that claim. He wrote: “If Turkey is sincere in its desire to attract Syria away from Iran (...) this will be of interest for us all.” But what is clear is that until now, Syria is the one which brought Turkey and Iran closer; a matter which is not looked upon kindly by Arab countries that reject the militarization of the region and the exacerbation of its problems through nuclear proliferation. Naturally, Syria has its own interests, at the top of which lays the recapturing of its occupied land (the Golan Heights), a matter viewed by Arabs as a legitimate right. The Syrian-Iranian alliance is relatively old and was originally borne out of an ideological conflict: many members of the ruling Baath party in Syria found an Iranian alliance beneficial because the “brothers/enemies” in the Iraqi Baath Party confronted the Iranian Revolution out of fear that it would spread to their country, which hosted

a repressed Shia majority. The Iraqi Bath Party fell in 2003, but Syria maintains the same position for strategic reasons relating to its influence in Lebanon and its regional role. Iran may seem a winning card to Damascus, perhaps because it involves key benefits, such as oil, funding, and Hezbollah, at a time when Syria envisions no near-term political solution to its endemic problem with Israel.

Expectedly, Syria wishes to play the role of mediator between the Arabs and Iran, which is also Turkey's objective. But the latter hopes for a bigger role thanks to its NATO membership, its EU candidacy, and its situation in a region linking the Middle East to the Balkans and the Caucasus. Turkish influence bothers all those who cannot perceive it within a limited frame of interests and objectives. The United States finds it suspicious, Europe says that it cannot accept Turkey's claims of being "the voice of the Muslims" in NATO or even within the EU, and Arab rulers are not comfortable with Turkey's leaders one-upping them on Palestine and other matters. Secular Arab elites that are struggling for the establishment of the culture of democracy, law, and human rights are not pleased with Turkey's entering through the window of political Islam and support for Ahmadinejad's dictatorship. In reality, this has weakened Turkey's position after it had been seen by the repressed Arabs as a model for a country that was capable of marrying secularism with Islam.

In sum, I conclude that we do not find in these cables anything that points to real damage to American diplomacy. In fact, some of the revelations endanger regional relations in the Middle East, driving them into further stress and tension. We shall see how the open source influences these societies, where transparency was neglected for decades under the pretext of "threats".

Effects on regimes and domestic policies

I will mention just two examples that clearly demonstrate the profound effect of the disclosure of important diplomatic documents on the development of political awareness among large sectors of society, and in support of the opposition and change. These examples are of extreme significance to Egypt and Tunisia, which witnessed popular uprisings against the ruling regimes that soon evolved into two of the most important Arab revolutions of modern times. My comments are as follows:

1. I am not proposing that WikiLeaks is responsible for igniting the revolutions; by disclosing many facts to the Internet audience (the youth in the two countries), it contributed to the impression – which may have been true – that

- the Tunisian regime's strongest ally, the United States, would abandon it or was ready to abandon it because of its rampant corruption and the impossibility of reform from within.
2. Those reading some cables written by former US Ambassador to Tunisia Robert Godec will undoubtedly discern the degree of confusion among the Americans, and even some desperation regarding the possibility of reforming the corrupt dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Translated into French and Arabic to make them accessible to non-English speakers, these cables contained thorough analyzes, penned by Ambassador Godec, regarding the deteriorating conditions in Tunisia during the last term of Ben Ali, with everyone aware that the deposing of the dictator had become possible – even if nobody knew how that would take place. The answer was provided by a revolution which became synonymous with the youth due to the role played by the new generation, the generation of the Internet, which exchanged this information and others through social networks such as Facebook and Twitter⁵³, putting modern communication technology in the service of the people in a manner that the former Tunisian and Egyptian governments did not anticipate until it was too late. Mubarak's regime was quick to disconnect Internet services, having been aware that what took place in Tunisia was possible due to the quick exchange of information online. And some spoke of coordination between the revolutionary democratic Arab youth on that level.⁵⁴
 3. Like those sent by its counterparts in Tunis, the diplomatic cables originating at the US Embassy in Egypt contain condemnations of Mubarak's regime. More importantly, they include predictions and perceptions of the succession scenario.

Below are some brief excerpts from these cables, which everyone needs to read at length in order to absorb their analyzes, testimonials, conclusions, and predictions.

In a cable from Tunis dated June 23, 2008⁵⁵, Ambassador Godec said: "President Ben Ali's extended family is often cited as the nexus of Tunisian corruption. Often referred to as a quasi-

⁵³ We also should not underestimate the role played by satellite television channels, at the forefront of which is Al Jazeera, whose exhibition of courage and efficiency provided the best of service to the democratic movement.

⁵⁴ See for example:

David D. Kirkpatrick and David E. Sanger, "A Tunisian-Egyptian Link That Shook Arab History," The New York Times, February 13, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/world/middleeast/14egypt-tunisia-protests.html?_r=1&hp

⁵⁵ Corruption in Tunisia : What's Yours is Mine :

mafia, an oblique mention of ‘the Family’ is enough to indicate which family you mean (...) One Tunisian lamented that Tunisia was no longer a police state, it had become a state run by the mafia. ‘Even the police report to the Family!’ he exclaimed. With those at the top believed to be the worst offenders, and likely to remain in power, there are no checks in the system.”

In a cable from Tunis dated July 17, 2009⁵⁶, Godec diagnosed the Tunisian predicament as follows: “Despite Tunisia’s economic and social progress, its record on political freedoms is poor. Tunisia is a police state, with little freedom of expression or association, and serious human rights problems (...) Tunisia has been ruled by the same president for 22 years. He has no successor. And, while President Ben Ali deserves credit for continuing many of the progressive policies of President Bourguiba, he and his regime have lost touch with the Tunisian people. They tolerate no advice or criticism, whether domestic or international. Increasingly, they rely on the police for control and focus on preserving power. And, corruption in the inner circle is growing (...) anger is growing (...) As a consequence, the risks to the regime’s long-term stability are increasing.” Ambassador Godec ended this long analytical cable with the following comments: “Tunisia is not an ally today, but we still share important history and values.” He added: “In the end, serious change here will have to await Ben Ali’s departure.”

These last two sentences contain a true “time bomb”. They entail a sharp alteration in the American stance on Ben Ali, who is believed by many to have been placed in his position by the US Central Intelligence Agency. The statements that his regime “is not an ally” and that the necessary changes (democratic reforms) will not take place unless the president leaves are not mere words – had they not been said under the cloak of diplomatic secrecy, they would have been interpreted as a green light to engineer a military coup in Tunisia. And who knows? Maybe this is what was being planned. But the civil, popular, and democratic revolution surprised everyone, including the United States and France, as it brought about the fall of Ben Ali and his flight from the country, creating a shockwave with long- and short-term effects in the region which we are still unable to fully fathom. I do not wish to turn this paper into an off-topic lecture on the Tunisian Revolution, but there is no escaping the acknowledgment of two factors: first, the role of the Internet in general and of social networks and WikiLeaks in particular in preparing for the revolution, exchanging information, and coordinating mass demonstrations since the middle of December 2010, a matter that still requires further study; second, the disclosure of documents on the WikiLeaks website a few weeks before the outbreak of the revolution in

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2008/06/08TUNIS679.html>

⁵⁶ Troubled Tunisia: What Should We Do?

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2009/07/09TUNIS492.html>

Tunisia makes it difficult to adopt any hypothesis that Internet-savvy youth, who were the vanguard of the revolution, did not read the documents or were unmoved by their content.⁵⁷

In a cable from Cairo dated December 1, 2010⁵⁸, Scobey wrote that “since the 1967 war against Israel, Egypt has been almost continuously living in a state of emergency, which allows the implementation of the emergency law of 1958 that grants the government a wide range of power to limit civilian freedoms, outside civil and criminal laws.” At the same time, the cable asserts that the emergency law was implemented in situations targeting the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist Muslim groups; it also mentions various instances involving the suppression of Internet and union activists.

The WikiLeaks cables uncovered many issues that had preoccupied the Egyptians, especially the matter of Mubarak’s succession. In a cable from Cairo on July 30, 2009, Dr. Ali Al Deen Hilal Al Dasouki, spokesperson for the ruling National Democratic Party, asserts over and over again to American diplomats that the “the real center of power in Egypt is the military,” and that despite the fact that military leaders do not intervene directly in the daily flow of governance, they are determined to maintain order, and are committed to a “legal transition” of power. In the same cable there are reassurances that the military is not against the transition of government to a civilian one, and hints that this civilian will be the son of the president himself. Dasouki admits that violence will inevitably take place during the 2010 parliamentary elections and the 2011 presidential elections. He adds that security forces were prepared for this eventuality, asserting: “Threats to daily survival, not politics, were the only thing to bring Egyptians to the streets en masse.”⁵⁹

In a previous cable from Cairo dated April 4, 2007, a member of the Egyptian Parliament asserted to the US Embassy that “the recently approved constitutional amendments package is largely aimed at ensuring Gamal Mubarak’s succession of his father.” The same cable also includes a conversation about Defense Minister Mohammed Hussein Tantawi and intelligence

⁵⁷ See in this regard: Hichem Karoui, “Military in Arab politics” The Gulf Today, January 08, 2011

<http://gulftoday.ae/portal/284485f8-a814-4ea1-8344-42e250896bbf.aspx>

Hichem Karoui, “Armed governance,” The Gulf Today, January 09, 2011

<http://gulftoday.ae/portal/dc8e57d4-7781-46da-b048-826082ca876b.aspx>

⁵⁸ Egypt's Emergency Law And Its Broad Uses :

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2010/01/10CAIRO64.html>

⁵⁹ NDP Insider: Military Will Ensure Transfer Of Power:

<http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/07/09CAIRO1468.html>

chief Suleiman, who were viewed as “threats”⁶⁰ to Gamal’s succession of his father, and about the possible occurrence of a military coup following the departure of Mubarak.

Another cable from Cairo on September 23, 2008 describes the intellectual and social deterioration of the Egyptian military institution according to the analysis of some academics and other observers in the country, as well as their statements to American diplomats. In their analysis, they set the heyday of the military establishment’s influence in the 1980s, i.e. before the removal of former Defense Minister Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazaleh due to “his growing political popularity.”⁶¹ Since then, the influence of the military has undergone a steady decline; the military profession is no longer what it used to be, and it no longer attracts the ambitious youth, who now see the increasing importance of the business elite. The military institution has grown intolerant of the intellectual freedom in society, and it opposes economic reforms when they contradict its own benefits and economic status. The cable adds that Gamal Mubarak does not enjoy support among the military. From this narrative, we understand that Egypt is witnessing a sharp and escalating competition between the business elite and the military elite over power. The diplomat concludes by saying that in the event of a succession crisis, the military’s behavior cannot be predicted.

Many other cables highlight how since 2005⁶², American diplomats expected the appointment of Suleiman as vice president, and some cables discuss his role in undermining Hamas in Palestine. The cables also spoke of Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa as a potential presidential competitor to Gamal Mubarak, of the extension of the emergency law, of the organized attacks on the opposition, and of the intensified oppression of those calling for reconciliation. All this came in the shadow of the succession battle and the attempts by Mubarak to offer his mediation in regional conflicts in exchange for the lessening of Western pressures demanding reforms, which is made evident in a cable dated May 16, 2006.⁶³

Another cable dated May 14, 2007 discusses the details of the constitutional amendments that made it impossible for independents to run for the presidency, enshrining Mubarak as president for life, and limiting the possibilities for succession to Gamal Mubarak, Moussa, and Suleiman

⁶⁰ MP On Presidential Succession:

<http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2007/04/07CAIRO974.html>

⁶¹ Academics See The Military In Decline, But Retaining Strong Influence:

<http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2008/09/08CAIRO2091.html>

⁶² Report: Mubarak To Name Vice President:

<http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2005/06/05CAIRO4534.html>

⁶³ Scen setter For Deputy Secretary Zoellick’s Visit To Egypt:

<http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2006/05/06CAIRO2933.html>

by marginalizing other candidates. However, the cable also discusses the possible emergence of then-Trade Minister Rashid Mohammed Rashid as a candidate, unlike the Brotherhood leaders, who do not represent a true threat for the other candidates in a post-Mubarak scenario. The cable ends by saying: “It is inevitable that the next Egyptian president will be politically weaker than Mubarak”, and he will need to build his popularity as soon as he is in power. The cable expects that the coming president will attempt to distance himself from Mubarak’s methodology, at least in his speeches; he will “appear with an anti-American image in an attempt to highlight his patriotism.”⁶⁴ He could extend his hand to the Muslim Brotherhood, as Gamal Abdel Nasser did before, in order to maintain control of the opposition. In addition to an analysis of the Egyptian political map, this final cable also offers a vision of a post-Mubarak scenario, with its men and possible policies. Recent events in Egypt have proven that many of the writings and predictions of American diplomats are relatively sound, therefore endowing these documents with historical, social, and political credibility.

Conclusion and findings

1. It is ostensible that Middle Eastern countries did not benefit from the WikiLeaks revelations, and that all of their governments underwent trials as they were exposed to their peoples in an unprecedented manner. We do not know the extent of the discomfort experienced by the United States, and as for WikiLeaks, it has gained broad international recognition.
2. As far as I know, not one country in the Middle East has even thought of revising its relations with the United States following the WikiLeaks revelations. None of these countries would ever bluntly accuse the United States of being directly or indirectly responsible for the leaks. Bilateral relations do not seem to have been affected much.
3. The events in Tunisia and Egypt have surpassed the traditional political forces as well as the opposition elites. Even if the oppositions in both Egypt and Tunisia observed the WikiLeaks documents, they did not really play large roles in the popular revolutions, which were spontaneous. Hence, one cannot assert that viewing these documents gave any incentive to pressure the government. The reality is that the opposition was in no position to apply any pressure. Only when those parties joined the people, led by the Internet youth, did they gain the ability to negotiate and play visible roles.
4. A US DOD document⁶⁵ reveals that the governments of China, Israel, North Korea, Russia, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and many others prevented their citizens from accessing the WikiLeaks

⁶⁴ Presidential Succession In Egypt:

<http://213.251.145.96/cable/2007/05/07CAIRO1417.html>

⁶⁵ “(U) Wikileaks.org—An Online Reference to Foreign Intelligence Services, Insurgents, or Terrorist Groups?” NGIC-2381-0617-08 ,Information Cutoff Date: 28 February 2008. Publication Date: 18 March 2008. Prepared by: Michael

website. The presence of Israel on this list of countries practicing such censorship raises the question of what, regarding Israel, is hidden in the documents and remains undisclosed.

5. At the local level, the element of fear will play a major role in the drive towards transparency, especially after the events in Tunisia and Egypt. Although WikiLeaks does not present itself as a political organization of the opposition, with the definition of “opposition” being that it carries an alternative program to the current authority, it continues to inspire opposition groups, while supplying them with additional cards with which to apply pressure and negotiate. In this respect, I anticipate that the disclosure of various documents pertaining to American and Arab diplomacy will play a role in developing political awareness in countries that lack transparency and accountability. At the same time, the interaction between the evolution of political awareness and the reactions of governments based on the element of fear in closed Arab societies will, in turn, drive a new social and political dynamic. This dynamic has indeed begun, as was confirmed by the imagery of revolution and the demands for political participation and reform everywhere in the Arab world.

6. At the regional level, the element of transparency (releasing the leaks) will interact with the element of risk in order to create a new perception of the challenges at hand. In the near future and under this binary pressure (transparency and risk), we are bound to find either astonishing compromises on regional problems that, up to this point, have been endemic (which would constitute a diplomatic victory, thanks to the exposure of diplomacy), or a resolution of the region’s problems by means of war.

7. In any event, I am not convinced that the publication of the WikiLeaks diplomatic cables has exposed US national security to any danger, or that it has resulted in strongly pressuring the US government to revise its policies, as has been the case for Middle Eastern countries.

Hichem Al Karoui. Paris. February/March 2011

D. Horvath, Cyber Counterintelligence Assessments Branch. Army Counterintelligence Center. [U.S. Intelligence planned to destroy WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks release: March 15, 2010].

