

Introduction: WikiLeaks and Empire

Julian Assange

One day, a monk and two novices found a heavy stone in their path. "We will throw it away," said the novices. But before they could do so, the monk took his ax and cleaved the stone in half. After seeking his approval, the novices then threw the halves away. "Why did you cleave the stone only to have us throw it away?" they asked. The monk pointed to the distance the half stones had traveled. Growing excited, one of the novices took the monk's ax and rushed to where one half of the stone had landed. Cleaving it, he threw the quarter, whereupon the other novice grabbed the ax from him and rushed after it. He too cleaved the stone fragment and threw it afield. The novices continued on in this fashion, laughing and gasping, until the halves were so small they traveled not at all and drifted into their eyes like dust. The novices blinked in bewilderment. "Every stone has its size," said the monk.

At the time of writing, WikiLeaks has published 2,325,961 diplomatic cables and other US State Department records, comprising some two billion words. This stupendous and seemingly insurmountable body of internal state literature, which if printed would amount to some 30,000 volumes, represents something new. Like the State Department, it cannot be grasped without

breaking it open and considering its parts. But to randomly pick up isolated diplomatic records that intersect with known entities and disputes, as some daily newspapers have done, is to miss “the empire” for its cables.

Each corpus has its size.

To obtain the right level of abstraction, one which considers the relationships between most of the cables for a region or country rather than considering cables in isolation, a more scholarly approach is needed. This approach is so natural that it seems odd that it has not been tried before.

The study of empires has long been the study of their communications. Carved into stone or inked into parchment, empires from Babylon to the Ming dynasty left records of the organizational center communicating with its peripheries. However, by the 1950s students of historical empires realized that somehow the communications medium *was* the empire. Its methods for organizing the inscription, transportation, indexing and storage of its communications, and for designating who was authorized to read and write them, in a real sense *constituted* the empire. When the methods an empire used to communicate changed, the empire also changed.¹

Speech has a short temporal range, but stone has a long one. Some writing methods, such as engraving into stone, suited the transmission of compressed institutional rules that needed to be safely communicated into future months and years. But these methods did not allow for rapidly unfolding events, or for official nuance or discretion: they were set in stone. To address the gaps, empires with slow writing systems still had to rely heavily on humanity’s oldest and yet most ephemeral communications medium: oral conventions, speech.

Other methods, such as papyrus, were light and fast to create, but fragile. Such communications materials had the advantage of being easy to construct and transport, unifying occupied regions through rapid information flow that in turn could feed a reactive central management. Such a well-connected center

could integrate the streams of intelligence coming in and swiftly project its resulting decisions outwards, albeit with resulting tendencies toward short-termism and micromanagement. While a sea, desert, or mountain could be crossed or bypassed at some expense, and energy resources discovered or stolen, the ability to project an empire's desires, structure, and knowledge across space and time forms an absolute boundary to its existence.

Cultures and economies communicate using all manner of techniques across the regions and years of their existence, from the evolution of jokes shared virally between friends to the diffusion of prices across trade routes. This does not by itself make an empire. The structured attempt at managing an extended cultural and economic system using communications is the hallmark of empire. And it is the records of these communications, never intended to be dissected, and so especially vulnerable to dissection, that form the basis for understanding the nature of the world's sole remaining "empire."

ANATOMY OF THE US EMPIRE

And where is this empire?²

Each working day, 71,000 people across 191 countries representing twenty-seven different US government agencies wake and make their way past flags, steel fences, and armed guards into one of the 276 fortified buildings that comprise the 169 embassies and other missions of the US Department of State. They are joined in their march by representatives and operatives from twenty-seven other US government departments and agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the various branches of the US military.

Inside each embassy is an ambassador who is usually close to domestic US political, business or intelligence power; career diplomats who specialize in the politics, economy, and public diplomacy of their host state; managers, researchers, military

attachés, spies under foreign-service cover, personnel from other US government agencies (for some embassies this goes as far as overt armed military or covert special operations forces); contractors, security personnel, technicians, locally hired translators, cleaners, and other service personnel.³

Above them, radio and satellite antennas scrape the air, some reaching back home to receive or disgorge diplomatic and CIA cables, some to relay the communications of US military ships and planes, others emplaced by the National Security Agency in order to mass-intercept the mobile phones and other wireless traffic of the host population.

The US diplomatic service dates back to the revolution, but it was in the post-World War II environment that the modern State Department came to be. Its origins coincided with the appointment of Henry Kissinger as secretary of state, in 1973. Kissinger's appointment was unusual in several respects. Kissinger did not just head up the State Department; he was also concurrently appointed national security advisor, facilitating a tighter integration between the foreign relations and military and intelligence arms of the US government. While the State Department had long had a cable system, the appointment of Kissinger led to logistical changes in how cables were written, indexed, and stored. For the first time, the bulk of cables were transmitted electronically. This period of major innovation is still present in the way the department operates today.

The US Department of State is unique among the formal bureaucracies of the United States. Other agencies aspire to administrate one function or another, but the State Department represents, and even houses, all major elements of US national power. It provides cover for the CIA, buildings for the NSA mass-interception equipment, office space and communications facilities for the FBI, the military, and other government agencies, and staff to act as sales agents and political advisors for the largest US corporations.⁴

One cannot properly understand an institution like the State

Department from the outside, any more than Renaissance artists could discover how animals worked without opening them up and poking about inside. As the diplomatic apparatus of the United States, the State Department is directly involved in putting a friendly face on empire, concealing its underlying mechanics. Every year, more than \$1 billion is budgeted for “public diplomacy,” a circumlocutory term for outward-facing propaganda. Public diplomacy explicitly aims to influence journalists and civil society, so that they serve as conduits for State Department messaging.

While national archives have produced impressive collections of internal state communications, their material is intentionally withheld or made difficult to access for decades, until it is stripped of potency. This is inevitable, as national archives are not structured to resist the blowback (in the form of withdrawn funding or termination of officials) that timely, accessible archives of international significance would produce. What makes the revelation of secret communications potent is that we were not supposed to read them. The internal communications of the US Department of State are the logistical by-product of its activities: their publication is the vivisection of a living empire, showing what substance flowed from which state organ and when.

Diplomatic cables are not produced in order to manipulate the public, but are aimed at elements of the rest of the US state apparatus, and are therefore relatively free from the distorting influence of public relations. Reading them is a much more effective way of understanding an institution like the State Department than reading reports by journalists on the public pronouncements of Hillary Clinton, or Jen Psaki.

While in their internal communications State Department officials must match their pens to the latest DC orthodoxies should they wish to stand out in Washington for the “right” reasons and not the “wrong” ones, these elements of political correctness are themselves noteworthy and visible to outsiders who are not sufficiently indoctrinated. Many cables are deliberative or

logistical, and their causal relationships across time and space with other cables and with externally documented events create a web of interpretive constraints that reliably show how the US Department of State and the agencies that inter-operate with its cable system understand their place in the world.

Only by approaching this corpus holistically—over and above the documentation of each individual abuse, each localized atrocity—does the true human cost of empire heave into view.

NATIONAL SECURITY RELIGIOSITY AND THE INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION

While there exists a large literature in the structural or *realpolitik* analysis of key institutions of US power, a range of ritualistic and even quasi-religious phenomena surrounding the national security sector in the United States suggests that these approaches alone lack explanatory power. These phenomena are familiar in the ritual of flag-folding, the veneration of orders, and elaborate genuflection to rank, but they can be seen also in the extraordinary reaction to WikiLeaks' disclosures, where it is possible to observe some of their more interesting features.

When WikiLeaks publishes US government documents with classification markings—a type of national-security “holy seal,” if you will—two parallel campaigns begin: first, the public campaign of downplaying, diverting attention from, and reframing any revelations that are a threat to the prestige of the national security class; and, second, an internal campaign within the national security state itself to digest what has happened. When documents carrying such seals are made public, they are transubstantiated into forbidden objects that become toxic to the “state within a state”—the more than 5.1 million Americans (as of 2014) with active security clearances, and those on its extended periphery who aspire to its economic or social patronage.⁵ There is a level of hysteria and non-corporeality exhibited in this reaction to WikiLeaks' disclosures that is not easily captured by

traditional theories of power. Many religions and cults imbue their priestly class with additional scarcity value by keeping their religious texts secret from the public or the lower orders of the devoted. This technique also permits the priestly class to adopt different psychological strategies for different levels of indoctrination. What is laughable, hypocritical, or Machiavellian to the public or lower levels of “clearance” is embraced by those who have become sufficiently indoctrinated or co-opted into feeling that their economic or social advantage lies in accepting that which they would normally reject. Publicly, the US government has claimed, falsely, that anyone without a security clearance distributing “classified” documents is violating the Espionage Act of 1917. But the claims of the interior “state within a state” campaign work in the opposite direction. There, it orders the very people it publicly claims are the only ones who can legally read classified documents to refrain from reading documents WikiLeaks and associated media have published with classification markings on them, lest they be “contaminated” by them. While a given document can be read by cleared staff when it issues from classified government repositories, it is forbidden for the same staff to set eyes on the exact same document when it emerges from a public source. Should cleared employees of the national security state read such documents in the public domain, they are expected to self-report their contact with the newly profaned object, and destroy all traces of it.

This response is, of course, irrational. The classified cables and other documents published by WikiLeaks and associated media are completely identical to the original versions officially available to those with the necessary security clearance, since this is where they originated. They are electronic copies. Not only are they indistinguishable—there is literally no difference at all between them. Not a word. Not a letter. Not a single bit.

The implication is that there is a non-physical property that inhabits documents once they receive their classification markings, and that this magical property is extinguished, not by

copying the document, but by making the copy public. The now public document has, to devotees of the national security state, not merely become devoid of this magical property and reverted to a mundane object, it has been inhabited by another non-physical property: an evil one.

This kind of religious thinking has consequences. Not only is it the excuse used by the US government to block millions of people working for the “state within a state” from reading more than thirty different WikiLeaks domains—the same excuse that was used to block the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, *El País*, and other outlets publishing WikiLeaks materials.⁶

In fact, in 2011 the US government sent what might be called a “WikiLeaks fatwa” to every federal government agency, every federal government employee, and every federal government security contractor:

The recent disclosure of US Government documents by WikiLeaks has caused damage to our national security ... Classified information, whether or not already posted on public websites, disclosed to the media, or otherwise in the public domain remains classified and must be treated as such until such time it is declassified by an appropriate US government authority ... Contractors who inadvertently discover potentially classified information in the public domain shall report its existence immediately to their Facility Security Officers. Companies are instructed to delete the offending material by holding down the SHIFT key while pressing the DELETE key for Windows-based systems and clearing of the internet browser cache.⁷

After being contacted by an officer of the US Department of State, Columbia University’s School of International and Public

Affairs warned its students to “not post links to these documents nor make comments on social media sites such as Facebook or through Twitter. Engaging in these activities would call into question your ability to deal with confidential information, which is part of most positions with the federal government.”

A swathe of government departments and other entities, including even the Library of Congress, blocked internet access to WikiLeaks.⁸ The US National Archives even blocked searches of its own database for the phrase “WikiLeaks.”⁹ So absurd did the taboo become that, like a dog snapping mindlessly at everything, eventually it found its mark—its own tail. By March 2012, the Pentagon had gone so far as to create an automatic filter to block any emails, including inbound emails to the Pentagon, containing the word “WikiLeaks.” As a result, Pentagon prosecutors preparing the case against US intelligence analyst PFC Manning, the alleged source of the *Cablegate* cables, found that they were not receiving important emails from either the judge or the defense.¹⁰ But the Pentagon did not remove the filter—instead, chief prosecutor Major Ashden Fein told the court that a new procedure had been introduced to check the filter daily for blocked WikiLeaks-related emails. Military judge Col. Denise Lind said that special alternative email addresses would be set up for the prosecution.¹¹

While such religious hysteria seems laughable to those outside the US national security sector, it has resulted in a serious poverty of analysis of WikiLeaks publications in American international relations journals. However, scholars in disciplines as varied as law, linguistics, applied statistics, health, and economics have not been so shy. For instance, in their 2013 paper for the statistics journal *Entropy*, DeDeo et al.—all US or UK nationals—write that WikiLeaks’ *Afghan War Diary* “is likely to become a standard set for both the analysis of human conflict and the study of empirical methods for the analysis of complex, multi-modal data.”¹²

There is even an extensive use of WikiLeaks materials, particularly cables, in courts, including domestic courts, from the

United Kingdom to Pakistan, and in international tribunals from the European Court of Human Rights to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Set against the thousands of citations in the courts and in other academic areas, the poverty of coverage in American international relations journals appears not merely odd, but suspicious. These journals, which dominate the study of international relations globally, should be a natural home for the proper analysis of WikiLeaks' two-billion-word diplomatic corpus. The US-based *International Studies Quarterly* (ISQ), a major international relations journal, adopted a policy against accepting manuscripts based on WikiLeaks material—even where it consists of quotes or derived analysis. According to a forthcoming paper, “Who’s Afraid of WikiLeaks? Missed Opportunities in Political Science Research,” the editor of ISQ stated that the journal is currently “in an untenable position,” and that this will remain the case until there is a change in policy from the influential International Studies Association (ISA). The ISA has over 6,500 members worldwide and is the dominant scholarly association in the field. The ISA also publishes *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Political Sociology*, *International Interactions*, *International Studies Review*, and *International Studies Perspectives*.

The ISA’s 2014–15 president is Amitav Acharya, a professor at the School of International Service at the American University in Washington, DC. Nearly half of the fifty-six members on its governing council are professors at similar academic departments across the United States, many of which also operate as feeder schools for the US Department of State and other internationally-oriented areas of government.

That the ISA has banned the single most significant US foreign policy archive from appearing in its academic papers—something that must otherwise work against its institutional and academic ambitions—calls into question its entire output, an output that has significantly influenced how the world has come to understand the role of the United States in the international order.

This closing of ranks within the scholar class around the interests of the Pentagon and the State Department is, in itself, worthy of analysis. The censorship of cables from international relations journals is a type of academic fraud. To quietly exclude primary sources for non-academic reasons is to lie by omission. But it points to a larger insight: the distortion of the field of international relations and related disciplines by the proximity of its academic structures to the US government. Its structures do not even have the independence of the frequently deferent *New York Times*, which, while it engaged in various forms of cable censorship, at least managed to publish over a hundred.¹³

These journals' distortion of the study of international relations and censorship of WikiLeaks are clear examples of a problem. But its identification also presents a significant opportunity: to present an analysis of international relations that has not been hobbled by the censorship of classified materials.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO US EMPIRE

This book begins to address the need for scholarly analysis of what the millions of documents published by WikiLeaks say about international geopolitics. The chapters use a constellation approach to these documents to reveal how the United States deals with various regional and international power dynamics. It is impossible to cover the wealth of material or relationships in this first volume, but I hope that this work will stimulate long-form journalists and academics to eclipse it.

Chapter 1 reflects on America's status as an "empire," and considers what this means, seeking to characterize US economic, military, administrative, and diplomatic power with reference to the long sweep of global history over the last century. The chapter establishes the "imperialism of free trade" framework that the rest of Part II then develops—a framework wherein American military might is used, not for territorial expansion, but to perpetuate American economic preeminence. Both themes are considered in

more detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Chapter 1 also situates WikiLeaks in the context of an unprecedented growth in American official secrecy, and the evolution of US power following the commencement of the “war on terror.”

Chapter 2 examines the WikiLeaks materials on the so-called “war on terror.” Besides providing a keen summary of the war crimes and human rights abuses documented in WikiLeaks publications, along with a detailed historical overview of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq and the consequent unfolding disaster there, the chapter also draws conclusions about the ideological and conceptual substructure of America’s “war on terror,” and investigates how an aspect of the imperial prerogative of the United States is to exercise decisive power to ensure that terms like “just war,” “torture,” “terrorism,” and “civilian” are defined in its own favor. The argument adduces evidence from the full range of WikiLeaks publications, along with other sources, such as the recent CIA torture report. In the process, the chapter also examines the double standards and problems arising from the misuse of these concepts (including the attempt to delegitimize and marginalize WikiLeaks itself).

Chapter 3 embarks on a thoroughgoing discussion of the “empire of free trade”—the relationship of the American form of empire with the worldwide promotion of neoliberal economic reform, providing American corporations with access to “global markets.” The chapter draws on State Department cables published by WikiLeaks, as well as WikiLeaks publications dating back to 2007 concerning the “private sector,” including material on banks and global multilateral treaty negotiations. The chapter provides luminous examples of how the drive toward economic integration buttresses the position of the United States as an arms-length empire, and provides the underlying rationale for the patterns of intervention, military or otherwise, pursued in Latin America and beyond.

Chapter 4 is a do-it-yourself guide on how to use WikiLeaks’ Public Library of US Diplomacy (PlusD), written by

investigations editor Sarah Harrison. At the time of writing, PlusD contains 2,325,961 cables and other diplomatic records. The State Department uses its own logic to create, transmit and index these records, the totality of which form its primary institutional memory. Harrison explains how to get started searching, reading and interpreting cable metadata and content, from the infamous CHEROKEE restriction to the use of State Department euphemisms such as “opposing resource nationalism.”

The history of US policy regarding the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a rich case study in the use of diplomacy in a concerted effort to undermine an international institution. In Chapter 5, Linda Pearson documents what the cables reveal about the efforts of successive US administrations to limit the ICC’s jurisdiction. These include the use of both bribes and threats by the George W. Bush administration to corral states signed up to the ICC into providing immunity from war crimes prosecutions for US persons—and, under the Obama administration, more subtle efforts to shape the ICC into an adjunct of US foreign policy.

Japan and South Korea have been epicenters of US influence within East Asia for decades. The cables document nearly a decade of US efforts to affect domestic political outcomes within these two countries in line with its own long-term interests. In Chapter 14, investigative journalist Tim Shorrock examines the geopolitical triangle created by US relations with both countries, including its attempts to play one off against the other, as part of long-term efforts to undermine left-wing governments and policies within the region.

Of global GDP growth over the last decade, over 50 percent has been in Southeast Asia. This understanding has led to an explicit reassignment of military, diplomatic, and surveillance assets to Southeast Asia, epitomized by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as a strategy of “forward deployed diplomacy.”¹⁴ In Chapter 15, Richard Heydarian examines the cables on Southeast Asia and situates his findings within a broader historical critique of US influence in the region.

The critique of Western imperialism is most contentious in regions of the world that have historically been US protectorates, such as western Europe. So indoctrinated are European liberals in modern imperialist ideology that even the idea that the United States might be administering a global empire is routinely dismissed with references to concepts like “right to protect,” demonstrating a willful deafness not only to the structure of US power around the world, but also to how it increasingly talks about itself as an “empire.” In Chapter 6, Michael Busch examines the broad patterns of influence and subversion pursued by the global superpower on the political systems of Europe and its member states. Themes include European government collusion with the CIA’s rendition and torture programs, the subversion of European criminal justice and judicial systems to rescue alleged US government torturers from prosecution, and the use of US diplomacy to open up European markets to US aerospace companies, or to invasive, monopolistic technologies and patents, such as Monsanto’s genetically modified organisms.

In Chapter 13, Phyllis Bennis opts for a broad overview of WikiLeaks’ publications on Afghanistan—including not just the State Department cables, but also the Significant Action Reports (SIGACTs) published by WikiLeaks as the *Afghan War Diary*, and Congressional Research Reports and other documents on Afghanistan published by WikiLeaks prior to 2010. What emerges is a stark assessment of the folly of US military involvement in Afghanistan since 2001 and its cost in terms of human life and societal well-being.

Geopolitics is complicated, and all the more so in relation to a country like Israel. Israel’s military dominance in the Middle East; its diplomatic relations with other regional players such as Egypt, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey; its role as an avatar for US imperial policy within the area; its wayward exploitation of its protected status in pursuing its own genocidal policies toward the Palestinian people—all of these themes are brought to the

fore in Chapter 9, by Peter Certo and Stephen Zunes, which carefully interrogates the relevant State Department cables.

In Chapter 11, on Iran, Gareth Porter provides an excellent companion to the chapter on Israel, choosing to focus on what the cables reveal about the tripartite geopolitical standoff between the US, Israel, and Iran, and the shadow this structure casts on the rest of the Middle East. In particular, Porter focuses on the P5+1 talks about Iran's nuclear enrichment program, on US efforts to misrepresent intelligence in order to tip the international consensus against Iran, and on the role of Israel as both a catalyst for and an agent of US policy in the Middle East.

The conflict in Iraq is the focus of Chapter 12, by journalist Dahr Jamail, which draws on a wide range of WikiLeaks materials to argue that the United States had a deliberate policy of exacerbating sectarian divisions in Iraq following its invasion and occupation, in the belief that the country would be easier to dominate in such circumstances. The consequent devastation is documented in painstaking detail using WikiLeaks materials, including US cables, Congressional Research Reports dating between 2005 and 2008, and the *Iraq War Logs* from 2010. Jamail pays specific attention to the "Sahwa" movement—the US-sponsored program of counter-insurgency that was implemented to respond to the growing influence of al-Qaeda affiliates among Sunni Iraqis disaffected by the Shia-dominated US-client government of Nouri al-Maliki. The United States paid large numbers of Iraqis to defect from the Sunni insurgency and instead fight against al-Qaeda, on the promise of receiving regular employment through integration into the Iraqi military. As Jamail argues, the failure of the Maliki government to honor this promise saw huge numbers of US-trained, US-armed, and US-financed—but now unemployed—Sunni militants return to the insurgency, eventually swelling the ranks of the former al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq, which in 2014 became known as ISIS, or the "Islamic State."

Across Iraq's northeastern border, in Syria, the cables also

describe how the scene was set for the emergence of ISIS. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, warmongers in the media have demanded the Western military pounding of Syria to depose Bashar Al-Assad—presented, in typical liberal-interventionist fashion, as a “new Hitler.” The emergence of the Islamic State, to which the Assad government is the only viable counterweight within Syria, has thrown this propagandistic consensus into disarray. But US government designs on Syrian regime change, and its devotion to regional instability, long pre-date the Syrian civil war, as is demonstrated in the cables. Chapter 10, by Robert Naiman, offers a careful reading of the Damascus cables, pointing out important historical presentiments of the current situation in Syria, and unpicking the benign-sounding human rights constructions of US diplomats to bring into focus the imperialist inflection of US foreign policy and rhetoric toward Syria—including concrete efforts within the country to undermine the government and bring about the chaos of recent months during the entire decade preceding 2011.

Clichés abound about Turkey being a “bridge between East and West,” but it cannot be denied that this country of some seventy-five million people occupies an important position—both as a regional player within Middle Eastern geopolitics and as a large and economically powerful nominal democracy on the fringes of Europe. As Conn Hallinan argues in Chapter 8, State Department cables illustrate US efforts to exploit the rich geopolitical significance of Turkey. Hallinan uses the cables as a pretext to provide a tour of Turkey’s regional alliances, strategic concerns, and internal affairs. Among the topics he covers are the complex strategic energy calculations that necessitate Turkey’s delicate relations with Iran and Russia, even as it cultivates the United States, Europe, and Israel in its efforts to gain access to Western markets. The chapter also examines Turkey’s bargaining power, demonstrated in its use of a veto against the election of former Danish prime minister Anders Rasmussen as the head of NATO, in order to force the United States to pressure the Danish

government into suppressing a Denmark-based Kurdish television channel. The essay also deals with Turkey's internal issues, such as government policy toward Kurdish separatist groups, and the extraordinary underground political conflict and intrigue between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the expatriate political figure Fethullah Gülen.

Since the end of the Cold War, and especially during the so-called "war on terror," US diplomacy has leaned toward South, Central, and East Asia. Except in the case of one or two flare-ups, US-Russian relations receded from the popular consciousness as the main geopolitical dynamic. This of course has changed as a result of the conflict in the Ukraine. But popular consciousness is not reality. As Russ Wellen shows in Chapter 7, in the decade following the century's turn the US has pursued a policy of aggressive NATO expansion, challenging Russia's regional hegemony within Eastern Europe and the former Soviet area and seeking to subvert nuclear treaties to maintain its strategic advantage. As the cables show, these efforts have not gone unnoticed by Russia, and are recurring points of conflict in US-Russian diplomatic relations, even during the most cordial of periods. The chapter provides the necessary context for recent East-West tensions centering around Syria, Ukraine, and the granting of asylum to Edward Snowden, and yields critical insight into a geopolitical relationship that, if mishandled, threatens the survival of our civilization and even of our species.

Perhaps no region of the world demonstrates the full spectrum of US imperial interference as vividly as Latin America. Since the 1950s, US policy in Central and South America has popularized the concept of the CIA coup d'état, deposing democratically elected left-wing governments and installing US-friendly right-wing dictatorships; inaugurating legacies of brutal civil war, death squads, torture, and disappearances; and immiserating millions to the benefit of the American ruling class. As Alexander Main, Jake Johnston, and Dan Beeton note in the first of their chapters on Latin America, Chapter 17, the English-speaking

press saw no evil in the State Department cables, concluding that they did not fit “the stereotype of America plotting coups and caring only about business interests and consorting with only the right wing.” The exact opposite is true: the cables demonstrate a smooth continuity between the brutal US policy in Latin America during the Cold War and the more sophisticated plays at toppling governments that have taken place in recent years. Chapter 17 offers a broad overview of the use of USAID and “civil society” astroturfing, as well as other, more direct methods of pursuing “regime change” in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Haiti. Chapter 18, by the same authors, focuses on Venezuela, the socialist enemy of the day, and specifically on US efforts to undermine the country as a regional left-wing bulwark in the wake of the failed US-backed coup against the Chávez government in 2002.

The response of the United States to the release of the WikiLeaks materials betrays a belief that its power resides in a disparity of information: ever more knowledge for the empire, ever less for its subjects.

In 1969, Daniel Ellsberg—later famous for leaking the Pentagon Papers—had a top-secret security clearance. Henry Kissinger had applied for his own top-secret clearance. Ellsberg warned him of its dangers:

[I]t will ... become very hard for you to learn from anybody who doesn't have these clearances. Because you'll be thinking as you listen to them: "What would this man be telling me if he knew what I know? Would he be giving me the same advice, or would it totally change his predictions and recommendations?" You will deal with a person who doesn't have those clearances only from the point of view of what you want him to believe and what impression you want him to

go away with, since you'll have to lie carefully to him about what you know. In effect, you will have to manipulate him. You'll give up trying to assess what he has to say. The danger is, you'll become something like a moron. You'll become incapable of learning from most people in the world, no matter how much experience they may have in their particular areas that may be much greater than yours.¹⁵

Freed from their classified seals, the WikiLeaks materials bridge the gulf between the "morons" with security clearances and nothing to learn, and us, their readers.