

WikiLeaks says it has Taiwan cables

Written by Taipei Times

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The huge cache of confidential US diplomatic cables that is being released by whistleblower Web site WikiLeaks is believed to include large numbers of secret memos exchanged between Taiwanese and US diplomatic officials, perhaps giving the public a firsthand look at the fragile relationship.

WikiLeaks currently holds a set of more than 250,000 documents from between December 1966 and February this year, but has only made 278 available to the public. None of the documents originating from the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the US' de facto embassy in Taiwan in the absence of official diplomatic ties, has been released.

The site expects that all the documents will be released in stages over the next few months. So far, the vast majority of these cables have been seen by only a handful of media organizations in the US and Europe. WikiLeaks says it holds more than 4,000 US records on Taiwan. Of that number, about half are said to be unclassified and about 200 are "secret," with the rest being "confidential."

WikiLeaks said the value of diplomatic cables in its possession from the AIT ranked below Baghdad and Japan, but surprisingly above Moscow and Beijing.

The AIT's high level of communication suggests that the US diplomatic presence in Taiwan continues to be extensive and far-reaching, despite being unofficial in nature.

It is expected that the cables will include previously unpublished information on US arms sales to Taiwan and information on Beijing's attitude toward the policies of the Taiwanese government, especially the China-friendly economic strategy of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

Political assessments of Ma, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and other Taiwanese political, diplomatic and military leaders, as well as economic forecasts for Taiwan, are also believed to be included in the cables.

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Evidence of this can already be seen in the limited number of cables released.

A secret file originating in the US embassy in Beijing notes that Taiwan's participation as an observer in last year's World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO's decision-making body, was based on a "one China, very broadly interpreted" principle.

The information was apparently gathered through a discussion between former US charge d'affaires Dan Piccuta and a Chinese official, who is not named in the document.

Apparently quoting the Chinese official, the cable, dated April last year, says: "The agreement allowing Taiwan to participate as an observer at the WHA meetings in Geneva in May was 'one step forward' toward better Cross-Strait relations and demonstrated what could be achieved through consultations based on 'one China, very broadly interpreted.'"

The same cable also mentions Beijing's recognition of Taiwan and Tibet as part of its "core interests."

An issue that could "derail" relations, again apparently quoting the Chinese official, was US arms sales to Taiwan, including Chinese concerns that the US could sell advanced F-16C/D fighter aircraft, for which Taiwan has been lobbying.

Separately, on the issue of arms sales, another secret cable from the US embassy in Ankara, Turkey, notes that in January this year, the US was considering whether to ask Taiwan to aid Turkey in its counterinsurgency efforts by leasing some of its attack helicopters. It implies that the US and Taiwan still maintain high-level military contacts.

Writing that Turkey has a shortage of dual-engine, high-altitude attack helicopters needed to fight a separatist organization, the cable said: "We should also explore whether we can persuade Taiwan to sell or lease some of its own AH-1W aircraft now that Taiwan is taking delivery of Apaches."

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Taiwan maintains 59 AH-1W SuperCobra attack helicopters, an arsenal that will be augmented by the delivery of 31 advanced AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopters, due to be delivered in 2014.

In the meantime, however, the cable adds that “[US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates] should make no commitment.”

Another cable highlights the precarious state of Taiwan’s relations with its 23 remaining allies.

A cable originating from then-US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice that reports on US intelligence gathering priorities in Paraguay notes that the US embassy in Asuncion should pay close attention to the possibility of military assistance from Taiwan or China. Paraguay is Taiwan’s sole ally in South America.

Sent in March 2008, the cable says the US should focus on “information on other key bilateral international relationships, especially for China, Taiwan and Russia.”

Examples of this include the “status of international military cooperation or assistance programs, such as the kinds of military support that might be offered by China, Iran, Venezuela, Taiwan or other countries.”

So far, the Taiwanese government has remained low-key on the reports, with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defense saying they had yet to take a thorough look at the WikiLeaks cables. Defense officials also said they were unaware of any request by US defense officials for Taiwan to sell or lease helicopters to Turkey.

MOFA told the Taipei Times it would be “inappropriate” for the ministry to comment, as the documents belong to the US Department of State.

“Questions [on the WikiLeaks exposure] should be directed to the related party,” MOFA

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spokesman James Chang (詹嘉禮), said, referring to the US government.

Chang said the ministry “has made contact with the US government” to “get an understanding” of what the documents concerning Taiwan in Wikileaks’ possession would be before they are released to the public.

US media have described the overall release as “a vast treasure trove of secret State Department cables that have exposed the inner workings of US diplomacy, as well as bluntly candid assessments by American diplomats.”

In a statement on its Web site, WikiLeaks said: “The cables, which date from 1966 up until the end of February this year, contain confidential communications between 274 embassies in countries throughout the world and the State Department in Washington DC.”

The cables include “orders sent out from the Department of State, embassy reporting about the local governments and details of US government activities in each country,” it says.

An analysis of the entire 250,000 documents shows that the most frequent subjects discussed in the cables are external political relations, internal government affairs, human rights, economic conditions, terrorists and terrorism and the UN Security Council.

The Web site said the full set of 251,287 cables contained more than 261 million words.

WikiLeaks has given a full set of the cables to the New York Times, the Guardian, Der Spiegel, Le Monde and El Pais.

These newspapers are expected to publish, over the next few weeks, the cables they find most newsworthy.

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“The cables show the extent of US spying on its allies and the UN; turning a blind eye to corruption and human rights abuse in ‘client states,’ backroom deals with supposedly neutral countries; lobbying for US corporations; and the measures US diplomats take to advance those who have access to them,” the Web site says.

WikiLeaks says it was founded in 2006 by Chinese dissidents and journalists, mathematicians and start-up company technologists from the US, Taiwan, Europe, Australia and South Africa.

Originally, its main interest was in “exposing oppressive regimes in Asia, the former Soviet bloc, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.”

The Washington Post reported that while WikiLeaks has not identified the source of the cables, suspicions have centered on a US Army private, Bradley Manning, 23, who was also the suspected source of the military intelligence documents from Iraq and Afghanistan released earlier this year.

In a series of online “chats” this spring, Manning said: “[US Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton and several thousand diplomats around the world are going to have a heart attack when they wake up one morning and find an entire repository of classified foreign policy is available in searchable format to the public.”

Manning is now in military custody in the US and faces charges of downloading and transferring classified material.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/12/01](#)