

I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day

November 2010

Christmas came early this year, Nov 28th to be precise. That was the day Wikileaks began releasing secret dispatches exposing the private thoughts of US officials in cables sent home to Washington DC. Back in the 1960s US scientists administered LSD to unwitting citizens in an effort to find a 'truth drug' which would oblige detainees to give up their secrets without using traditional torture methods. The Wikileaks breakthrough resembles a massive, collective truth drug administered to US officials and their allies abroad, inducing them to give the game away.

Anyone with a working knowledge of US foreign policy will be well aware of the perverse nature of that country's relationships with the rest of the world but it is one thing to read Noam Chomsky and quite another to scan the plain language of diplomats and gatekeepers who believe they are talking to sympathetic, like minded companions. The initial headlines were predictable; The US government is actually aware that Russian president Vladimir Putin is a corrupt and violent tyrant, that Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is a buffoon addicted to underage sex and that French leader Nicolas Sarkozy is a vain but astute political operator. No surprises there. But Wikileaks really is the gift that keeps on giving as 250,000 cables seep steadily into the public eye, sparing no one. It was amusing to read dispatches written by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton inquiring after the mental health of Argentinian president Cristina Kirchner. How are the nerves? she asked in what has been a traditional Irish way of asking after someone on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Clinton also inquired after the violent tendencies of Kirchner's husband, Nestor, a former president regarded as the power behind his wife's administration. Unfortunately for Clinton, Mr Kirchner recently passed away, making her comments even more embarrassing. Clinton has spent several days making humble phone calls to foreign leaders to apologise for the rare moments in which she spoke honestly about overseas leaders.

The leaks are an important reminder that under the Obama Administration it is business as usual overseas, as that country's economic interests trump human dignity every time. The leaks also reveal the corruption at the heart of overseas trade and investment. In one memorable dispatch executives working for oil giant Shell in Nigeria told US diplomats that the company had inserted staff into every government ministry, giving the

company access to every scrap of information which might affect their oil profits. The Shell staff members passed on information on suspected militants to the US government and enjoyed advance notice on forthcoming oil deals. This type of intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations is better known as international espionage and the penalties are severe. As Shell began seeking permissions to develop the controversial Corrib Gas field in County Mayo, a leaked memo saw executives ask whether the company had sufficiently well placed officials in the relevant agencies to guarantee a smooth ride through the planning process.

The US government has struggled to come up with a response to the leaks, relying initially on the 'putting innocent lives at risk' strategy, a hollow statement from the country which has given us extraordinary rendition and the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in countries which have refused to obey its will over the past 50 years.

The White House Press Secretary then moved on to a new statement, saying that "such disclosures put at risk our diplomats, intelligence professionals, and people around the world who come to the United States for assistance in promoting democracy and open government." In Latin America the chief petitioners of US 'assistance' were the death squad democracies of Central America (El Salvador and Guatemala, 300,000 civilians killed), General Pinochet of Chile (3,000 dead, 200,000+ exiled) the Generals in Argentina (30,000 dead) and successive trigger happy Colombian governments (300,000 dead, four million displaced), to name but a few. Thankfully a new breed of government has emerged, in Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and beyond, which has firmly rejected US 'assistance' and is governing on behalf of its citizens, rather than bowing to the demands of overseas US economic interests. This explains why Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa has offered a passport and a home to Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and why the Bolivian government has added Wikileaks to its official website.