Responding to Wikileaks

Adam Ereli, Ambassador of the United States of America to Bahrain

President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have made it a priority to reinvigorate America's relationships around the world. They have been working hard to strengthen our existing partnerships and build new ones to meet shared challenges, from climate change to ending the threat of nuclear weapons to fighting disease and poverty. As the United States Ambassador to Bahrain, I'm proud to be part of this effort. The Kingdom of Bahrain is a strategic ally of the United States and a key player in promoting regional peace and stability. Over the years, our two countries have worked together to broaden our cooperation in a range of areas. We enjoy a bilateral Free Trade Agreement, and our bilateral trade increased by more than 44% between 2005 (the year before implementation) and 2009. The U.S. Navy has made a home in Bahrain for over 60 years and through academic and professional exchange programs, we have established people-to-people relationships that have brought our countries closer together.

Of course, even the closest relationships will have ups and downs. We have seen that in the past few days, when documents purportedly downloaded from U.S. Defense Department computers became the subject of reports in the media. They appear to contain our diplomats' assessments of policies, negotiations, and leaders from countries around the world as well as reports on private conversations with people inside and outside other governments.

I cannot vouch for the authenticity of any one of these documents. But I can say that the United States deeply regrets the disclosure of any information that was intended to be confidential. And we condemn it. Diplomats must engage in frank discussions with their colleagues, and they must be assured that these discussions will remain private. Honest dialogue—within governments and between them—is the foundation of international relations; we couldn't maintain peace, security, and international stability without it. I'm sure that Bahrain's ambassadors to the United States would say the same thing. They too depend on being able to exchange honest opinions with their counterparts in Washington and send home their assessments of America's leaders, policies, and actions.

I do believe that people of good faith recognize that diplomats' internal reports do not represent a government's official foreign policy. In the United States, they are one element out of many that shape our policies, which are ultimately set by the President and the Secretary of State. And those policies are a matter of public record, the subject of thousands of pages of speeches, statements, white papers, and other documents that the State Department makes freely available online and elsewhere.

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

The owners of the WikiLeaks website claim to possess some 250,000 classified documents, many of which have been released to the media. Whatever their motives are in publishing these documents, it is clear that releasing them poses real risks to real people, and often to particular people who have dedicated their lives to protecting others. An act intended to provoke the powerful may instead imperil the powerless. We support and are willing to have genuine debates about pressing questions of public policy. But releasing documents carelessly and without regard for the consequences is not the way to start such a debate.

For our part, the U.S. government is committed to maintaining the security of our diplomatic communications and is taking steps to make sure they are kept in confidence. We are moving aggressively to make sure this kind of breach does not happen again. And we will continue to work to strengthen our partnership with Bahrain and make progress on the issues that are important for our two countries. We can't afford anything less. President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and I remain committed to being trusted partners as we seek to build a better, more prosperous world for everyone.