

# Government Brushes Off U.S. Leaks

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A customer buying Der Spiegel at a kiosk Monday in Hamburg, Germany. **Christian Charisius**

The government on Monday shrugged off embarrassing details about how U.S. officials described Russia's leaders in secret diplomatic cables published by the WikiLeaks whistleblowing web site together with select media outlets.

"We found nothing interesting or deserving comment in the material," Kremlin spokeswoman Natalya Timakova told reporters, adding that "fictional Hollywood heroes hardly need comment."

In one cable, which was only quoted by news agencies including Reuters, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is dubbed the country's "alpha-dog" ruler, while President Dmitry Medvedev is belittled as "playing Robin to Putin's Batman," in a reference to the superheroes from the legendary U.S. comic book series.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called the documents "entertaining trash" but denied that they posed a threat to relations with Washington. "Regarding real politics we prefer to go by

our partners' concrete deeds," Lavrov told reporters in Delhi, Interfax reported.

Earlier, news agencies cited a Foreign Ministry source as saying diplomats felt regret and embarrassment because "digging through diplomatic dirty laundry was not a very pleasant experience."

The secret reports contain some very candid descriptions about how power is divided in the ruling tandem, though the Russian cables were less scandalous than in some other countries.

In a Feb. 12 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Paris, Defense Secretary Robert Gates [is quoted](#) as saying "Russian democracy has disappeared" and that the government is "an oligarchy run by the security services." Gates adds that Medvedev has a more pragmatic vision than Putin, "but there has been little real change," according to the document, which was published at <http://cablegate.wikileaks.org>.

WikiLeaks had only published 243 of more than 250,000 documents by late Monday, though several Western media outlets published excerpts from additional documents that they received in advance of the public release.

In perhaps the most colorful of the cables to be revealed so far, a U.S. diplomat reported from a wedding in the Dagestani capital Makhachkala, where Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov "danced clumsily" with his gold-plated gun stuck down his jeans.

Together with the host, Gadzhi Makhachev, who heads the Dagneft oil company, Kadyrov was said to have showered dancing children with \$100 bills. "The dancers probably picked upwards of \$5,000 off the cobblestones," the report notes, adding that Kadyrov, who was Chechen prime minister at the time, gave the happy couple "a five-kilo lump of gold."

In another cable, first lady Svetlana Medvedeva is said to be creating tension inside the government and is the object of intense gossip, German weekly Der Spiegel reported on its web site.

Medvedeva is running a blacklist of officials deemed disloyal to her husband, the report quoted an unidentified cable from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow as saying.

Moscow also told Israel that it would cancel the sale of S-300 missiles to Iran in return for access to sophisticated Israeli drone technology, according to a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv.

The document from December 2009 quotes Israeli Defense Ministry official Amos Gilad as saying Russia offered \$1 billion for the technology.

But Gilad told visiting U.S. Undersecretary of State Ellen Tauscher that Israel would not hand over the technology for fear that it would end up in the hands of China.

A Kremlin spokeswoman on Monday refused to comment further on any of the leaks.

In another cable from the U.S. Embassy in Baku, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev suggests that Medvedev has little influence over the government.

"Many high-ranking officials don't recognize [Medvedev] as a leader," Aliyev [is quoted](#) in the document, dated Feb. 24, as telling visiting U.S. Undersecretary of State William Burns.

The Azeri leader said there were signs of a strong confrontation between the teams of the two men, although not yet between Putin and Medvedev personally, the report says.

The revelation could greatly complicate Moscow's efforts to mediate in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which could be addressed during a OSCE summit in Kazakhstan later this week.

The White House condemned the publications as "reckless and dangerous" and directed government agencies to tighten procedures for handling classified information, news reports said.

The decision endangers U.S. diplomats, intelligence agents and democratic activists who seek America's help, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said Sunday, The Associated Press reported.

The leak is thought to be the work of Private First Class Bradley Manning, an Army intelligence analyst, who has said he downloaded the documents together with more than 90,000 intelligence reports on the war in Afghanistan from a military computer system.

Manning, 22, has been in solitary confinement for the past seven months.

At least one State Duma deputy called for tighter controls over the Internet, which has been a haven for free speech in Russia.

This scandal shows that serious measures are necessary to protect information from appearing online, the Liberal Democratic Party's Leonid Slutsky, a first deputy chairman of the Duma's International Affairs Committee, told Interfax.

Andrei Klimov, a United Russia deputy on the same committee, told The Moscow Times that it was vital to protect sensitive information from getting into the wrong hands.

"Next time, someone will publish the access code to the nuclear briefcase," he said with reference to the special communications system that guards the country's nuclear arsenal.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, an Australian, has said in the past that he planned to publish compromising material about Russian officials and businessmen.

Earlier this month, businessman Alexander Lebedev said Assange met with a reporter from the opposition minded Novaya Gazeta, which he co-owns.

A Novaya Gazeta spokeswoman said Monday that she could not comment at this stage on the meeting.

The Federal Security Service has suggested that it does not see WikiLeaks as a real threat.

"If necessary, the site can be shut down forever," Lifenews.ru quoted an unidentified FSB official as saying last month.

But most experts argue that it is impossible to censor the Internet on a massive scale like in China, which would result in an international outcry and contradict efforts spearheaded by Medvedev to promote information technology.

They point to the fact that even sites of radical Islamists from the North Caucasus are accessible in the country.

Mikhail Fedotov, chairman of Medvedev's Human Rights Council and a long-standing secretary of the Union of Journalists, said it was telling that the leak had occurred in the United States.

"In this case, all criticism goes to the U.S. — they were responsible for keeping the secrets that were leaked," he told *The Moscow Times*.

His words were echoed by Lavrov, who stressed on Friday that the leaks were a problem for Washington, not Moscow.

"If secret documents are stolen [in the United States], this does not mean that such a thing happens here — and certainly not on such a scale," he was quoted by national news agencies as saying.

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