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The WikiLeaks Mess (or Yawn!)

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 30, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

I am having a tough time getting my head around the idea that the release of a bunch of diplomatic cables is "news." These documents are the stuff of historians and, even there, normal diplomatic channels are not what they once were. The White House takes the lead in most crucial foreign policy assessments, not the State Department. Ambassadors still play vital roles on issues like trade, but the hot button stuff is decided in the White House Situation Room. So, I doubted the cables being leaked would reveal much of any significance, the perturbed, angry protests of "wise men" like David Gergen notwithstanding.

Of course, politicians the world over, are notoriously thin-skinned and they may not appreciate the candid assessments the cables contain. But, pride has so thoroughly consumed the souls of most politicians, will they protest the indiscretions when such protests will only amplify and repeat the offense? I doubt it.

There appear to be a few stray pieces of information in the leaks that are of genuine significance. It turns out that there is not much value in trying to take out Iran's nuclear capability with a military strike because that would only push their program back a couple of years. That is news, depressing news, but news nonetheless.

But, the biggest consequence of the leaks is a big yawn. This morning's Washington Post has photos of eight world leaders under the heading "A world of candor" and underneath each photo, what the leaks say about the person. So, under the photo of Vladimir Putin, we learn that the State Department thinks of him as an "alpha dog," playing "Batman" to Dmitri Medvedev's "Robin." Is that news? I suspect Mr. Putin is even gratified that the image he has worked quite tirelessly to project - the alpha-dog - has succeeded completely. Under the photo of Silvio Berlusconi, we read that the leaked cables describe his "frequent late nights and [a] penchant for partying hard." Who needs a State Dept. for that info? I learned that in the checkout counter at the grocery store months ago. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is called a "crazy old man" and, you know what? He is a crazy old man. And so on.

I predict that this whole episode will fade from view fairly quickly. History marches on. China may object to this or that quote, but we have a crisis in Korea to deal with. President Nicolas Sarkozy will have his nose out of joint for a bit, but as he is the President of the Fifth Republic, that is almost redundant. So, relax world. WikiLeaks, which is as good at promoting itself as it is at collecting data, has not brought the world to its knees. It just gave the 24-hour Cable News beast something to chew on for a few days.

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