

## The WikiLeaks Arctic cables

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**ABSTRACT.** This note considers some of the WikiLeaks Arctic cables, and their possible implications for how we might understand the framing of the region. What matters is not so much the content of the leaked cables but rather the way in which their release stirred up debate about the underlying behaviour and motivation of interested parties, especially the Arctic Ocean coastal states. Their existence in the public domain usefully highlights the potential role for new knowledge networks and actors in the www era.

### Introduction

With a keen sense of timing, given the Greenlandic and Danish governments' hosting of the 7th Arctic Council ministerial meeting (Arctic Council 2011), seven 'sensitive' US diplomatic cables were leaked by WikiLeaks, an international non-profit organisation that publishes materials from anonymous sources, news leaks, and whistleblowers, that implicated the Arctic region in their coverage. Diplomatic telegrams, are confidential text messages usually exchanged between a diplomatic mission and their foreign ministry. They are, depending on the content, usually considered to be at the very least 'sensitive' and more often than not 'secret' or 'top secret'.

Since November 2010, WikiLeaks has released a series of US diplomatic telegrams involving correspondence and exchanges between the State Department and its diplomatic missions. Five European and North American based newspapers including *The Guardian* and the *The New York Times* were sent these materials for publication and, it was hoped on the part of WikiLeaks, in a manner to provoke public scrutiny and criticism. As the WikiLeaks website claimed at the time of the release:

WikiLeaks began on Sunday November 28th [2010] publishing 251,287 leaked United States embassy cables, the largest set of confidential documents ever to be released into the public domain. The documents will give people around the world an unprecedented insight into US Government foreign activities.

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. 15,652 of the cables are classified Secret (Wikileaks 2011).

At the time, *The Guardian* ran a story about 'How 250,000 US embassy cables were leaked' and explored how a disaffected US soldier, Bradley Manning, who is now being held in a US prison, was able to upload, with apparent ease, 'The 1.6 gigabytes of text files on the memory stick [which] ran to millions of words: the contents of more than 250,000 leaked state department cables, sent from, or to, US embassies

around the world' (*The Guardian* (London) 28 November 2010).

In this note, I review briefly some of the seven WikiLeaks Arctic cables. What interests me is not only the insights into diplomatic encounters that would remain typically sealed from public scrutiny but also the ways in which these leaked cables contribute to debates about the Arctic as an object of governance. As Slavoj Žižek noted more broadly, in his essay in the *London Review of Books*, 'So far, the WikiLeaks story has been represented as a struggle between WikiLeaks and the US Empire: is the publishing of confidential US state documents an act in support of the freedom of information, of the people's right to know, or is it a terrorist act that poses a threat to stable international relations? [...] The real disturbance was at the level of appearances: we can no longer pretend we don't know what everyone knows we know' (Žižek 2011). In other words, if the Arctic WikiLeaks matter, it is more to do with the manner in which they have exposed the workings of polar related diplomacy rather than the content *per se*.

### WikiLeaks and the Arctic

A BBC Newsnight story, dated 12 May 2011, proclaimed that, 'WikiLeaks cables show race to carve up Arctic'. It included details of the seven diplomatic cables, and their allegedly worrisome content and potential future impact. Reinforcing a particular geopolitical judgment pertaining to the contemporary Arctic, emphasis was placed on what: 'Some experts think that what is happening in the Arctic is like the Scramble for Africa in the 19th Century when European nations raced to secure resources' (BBC Newsnight 2011). This news report was not, in any way, unique however. *The Independent* newspaper headlined the story 'Revealed: the secret battle for the riches of the Arctic' and noted that, 'As the eight Arctic nations met in Greenland yesterday, cables released by WikiLeaks gave insight into the battle for control of the world's least explored region and the resources that lie beneath its icy waters' (*The Independent* (London) 13 May 2011). While *The Guardian* in its story of the leaks suggested that 'The WikiLeaks cables show how the scramble for resources in the Arctic is heightening military tension in the region, with NATO sources worried about the potential for armed conflict with Russia' (*The Guardian* (London) 12 May 2011).

The framing by the news media was only one aspect of the reaction to the breaking news. Environmental organisations such as Greenpeace also reacted swiftly to the revelations, especially in the light of its opposition to oil drilling off the coastline of Greenland. Under the heading of 'New WikiLeaks revelations shed light on Arctic oil "carve up"' it rallied against the 'new revelations' by the whistle blowing website WikiLeaks that

show how the scramble for resources in the Arctic is sparking military tension in the region, with NATO sources worried about the potential for armed conflict between the alliance and Russia. The release of previously unpublished US embassy cables also shows the extent to which Russia is manoeuvring to claim ownership over huge swathes of the Arctic, with one senior Moscow source revealing that a Russian explorer's famous submarine expedition to plant a flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole was ordered by Vladimir Putin's United Russia party' (Greenpeace 2011).

I do not intend to review all seven cables but to highlight a few for the purpose of stressing the way in which they give the public insights into conversations and networks not previously

available. Moreover, as Žižek hinted, these cables also bring to the fore that US State Department diplomatic cables at the very least, endorsed some of the dominant news framing of the Arctic as a potential source of conflict/instability, even if such suggestions might have been downgraded in public arenas (Žižek 2011).

The first cable details a brief exchange, sometime in 2007 and numbered 12958, between the former Danish foreign minister Per Stig Møller and US diplomatic officials about the delays concerning the US Senate's ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The cable notes 'Ratification [of UNCLOS] was clearly in the US interest. Moeller [US spelling] agreed, joking that "if you stay out, then the rest of us will have more to carve up in the Arctic"'. The comment itself, especially the phrase 'carve up', was seized upon by commentators to frame (once again) the leaked cables as indicative of a trend amongst the five Arctic Ocean coastal states to maximise their national resource and security interests. However, it also points to the fact that the US's non-accession to UNCLOS means that it is not formally in a position to submit materials regarding, for example, outer continental shelf delimitation to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). It also meant that the 2008 Ilulissat declaration between the Arctic Ocean coastal states, including the US, made reference to the Law of the Sea rather than UNCLOS.

But perhaps what's really important about this cable is something else, and that is the reference to 'joking'. Was Møller really 'joking'? Aiming, in other words, to secure nothing more than a laugh or smirk in what he thought was a private setting. He might have been horrified to think that four years later his quip was going to be released to the wider world. Or was he using a 'joke' to convey a very serious message to US diplomats that the US was at a geopolitical disadvantage because it could not submit materials to the CLCS and thus seek a 'recommendation' on sovereign rights beyond the continental shelf of the Arctic Ocean. So the ambiguity of the quote itself is an arresting one hinting as it does at multiple interpretative possibilities, and we should not underestimate the importance of joking in this context. As Christie Davies reminds us 'Jokes are always important as folklore, as entertainment and as one of the few ways in a mass-media dominated society in which ordinary people [and former Foreign Ministers we could add] can display verbal creativity and the skills of the actor and the story-teller' (Davies 2010).

The second cable (no. 222559), dated 27 August 2009, is from the US Embassy in Copenhagen and repeats a statement made by Russian Deputy Artur Chilingarov, the leader of the 2007 Russian Arctic expedition, concerning the planting of a Russian flag at the bottom of the central Arctic Ocean. While this spectacular event has been much discussed (for example Hellman 2009), the cable notes that 'Chilingarov was following orders from the ruling United Russia party' and that 'Russia could stake a greater claim to the region's seabed'. The phrase 'following orders' is perhaps the most significant here in the sense of reinforcing an interpretative thread amongst many commentators that the Russian governments of Putin and Medvedev have pursued a deliberate and highly strategic policy to enhance Russia's Arctic influence and control, and are widely credited with stimulating a 'new scramble for the Arctic' (Dodds 2008).

The fourth cable (129049), dated 7 November 2007, comes from the US Embassy in Copenhagen and details interest in

the possible independence of Greenland from the Kingdom of Denmark. Although composed before the 2008 referendum, it assumes that Greenland will secure independence in the near future and that there are good reasons for 'establishing a small and seasonal American presence post in Greenland's capital as soon as practicable'. The cable reports a comment by a senior Greenlandic official that the 'country' is "just one big oil strike away" from economic and political independence'. With the attendance of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the 7th Arctic Council ministerial meeting, this cable was used to explain the high level US interest in Greenland as being in large part related to its hydrocarbon and strategic resource potential.

The sixth cable (169680), dated 12 August 2008, from the US Embassy in Ottawa, urges the US State Department to delay releasing the January 2009 National Security/Homeland Security Presidential Directive on Arctic Region Policy, which *inter alia* declared that 'Freedom of the seas is a top national priority. The Northwest Passage is a strait used for international navigation, and the Northern Sea Route includes straits used for international navigation; the regime of transit passage applies to passage through those straits. Preserving the rights and duties relating to navigation and overflight in the Arctic region supports our ability to exercise these rights throughout the world, including through strategic straits' (United States 2009). Mindful of Canadian sensitivities regarding the legal status of the Northwest Passage, the cable suggested that it might be wise to 'delay the release of the new policy until after the October 14 election [in Canada]'. In other words, it was recognised that documents such as the White House directive possessed affective potential, it could and would 'unsettle' and even 'upset' Canadian political leadership contenders. However, a later cable dated January 2010, appeared to suggest that senior officials did not take very seriously Harper's Arctic policies and strategies (CBC News 2011).

Finally, the seventh cable (212098), dated 15 June 2009, written by the US Embassy in Moscow cited the following 'According to PM Harper [Canadian – Stephen Harper], Canada has a good working relationship with Russia with respect to the Arctic, and a NATO presence could backfire by exacerbating tensions. He commented that there is no likelihood of Arctic going to war, but that some non-Arctic members favored a NATO role in the Arctic because it would afford them influence in an area where "they don't belong"'. Strikingly, the comment by Harper provides a reminder, rather than a revelation, about his strongly developed geographical imagination. For the last five years, the Canadian Prime Minister has provided regular reminders of the embodied, iterative and performance related processes that help to constitute the Arctic in the first place. The use of words like 'they' and 'our' routinely litter his speeches as he travels around the Canadian Arctic in particular reminding citizens and strangers alike that Canada is a 'northern nation' (Dodds 2011).

### Conclusion

The leaked WikiLeaks Arctic cables bring to the fore several issues. First, we gain insights into diplomatic exchanges that would normally remain confidential, some of which clearly nourish framings and narratives pertaining to 'Arctic scrambles' and 'Arctic carve-ups'. Alternatively, we might point to the cables and say 'well it could actually be a lot worse' given the content, and thus conclude that diplomats are doing a good job preventing the worst kind of rapacious behaviour. Second, the

cables if they do not contain anything revelatory nonetheless force us to consider the role of public appearances. Is one take home message of this affair (as Zizek notes more generally) that diplomats and political leaders mislead, and sometimes lie, in order to reassure their public audiences that the Arctic region is being governed in a sustainable and peaceful manner? What if the former Danish foreign minister was not joking? What if the Canadians really believed that there are people who really 'don't belong' to the Arctic? Is the spectre of future oil/gas discoveries really driving much of current Arctic policies of Arctic Ocean coastal states? This matters given the claims made by the Arctic Council membership to exercise their environmental, legal and political authority responsibly. Third, do the release of these cables undermine diplomacy, whether Arctic-based or not, by their blatant undermining of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which outlines the confidentiality of diplomatic intercourse? Finally, do the cables, however briefly, talk to the emergence of new knowledge networks and actors engaging with the Arctic region in the ww era (more generally, Cull 2011)?

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## James Croll: a scientist ahead of his time

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**ABSTRACT.** James Croll (1821–1890) was a Scottish scientist who made major, although still largely unrecognised, contributions to the theory of the effects of variations in the Earth's orbit on the global climate. He was the first to identify the importance of positive feedbacks in the climate system, especially the ice-albedo feedback, and he placed the astrochronological method on a sound footing. Croll's theory was the first to predict multiple ice ages. However, it was unable to place the end of the most recent glaciation more recently than 80,000 years ago, and as evidence accumulated throughout the 19th century for a much more recent date than this Croll's theory fell into neglect. We argue that this was particularly unfortunate since several of his key ideas were forgotten, and that this has delayed the development of the orbital theory of paleoclimate.

### Introduction

James Croll (2 January 1821–15 December 1890) was a Scottish scientist from a modest background who made an outstanding, but insufficiently acknowledged, contribution to science. He contributed to a wide range of disciplines, but his greatest achievement was the development of the orbital theory of paleoclimate. Today, almost 150 years after his work in this area was first published, and a few months after the 190th anniversary of his birth, this achievement is still not as widely recognised as it ought to be.

Croll was born in rural Perthshire in 1821, the second son of a stonemason. At the age of eleven he developed a passion for reading, especially philosophy and science, which remained with him throughout his life. He at first pursued a varied but unsuccessful business career, including spells as innkeeper and tea merchant (Irons 1896) until 1858. In 1859 he became caretaker of Anderson's College and Museum in Glasgow, and in 1867 he accepted the post of resident geologist in the Edinburgh office of the Geological Survey, from which he retired in 1880. He had attracted the attention of the scientific establishment through the publication of 'On the physical cause of the change of climate during geological epochs' (Croll 1864). He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1876, being awarded a doctorate by St Andrew's University in the same year. He died in Perth in 1890.

The orbital theory of paleoclimate was first proposed by the French mathematician Joseph Adhémar (Adhémar 1842), who suggested that ice ages were caused by variations in the Earth's orbit, that is by astronomical effects (Croll, 1875; Imbrie and