



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
“WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy”
Inaugural Ambassadors Dinner
Australian Institute for International Affairs
RACV Club, Melbourne**

(Transcript – as delivered – February 10, 2011)

Well thank you very much Michael for that introduction, and I want to thank as well, the Prime Minister. In the U.S. you get to keep that title forever, so Prime Minister Fraser – wonderful to see you again and your beautiful wife.

Zara Kimpton, congratulations again on receiving the OAM. Hugh Morgan who is a companion of the Order, and also Chairman of Everything, as far as I can tell. Dr Nyran, The Consul General of the Republic of Turkey, and of course my great friend, the Consul General from Melbourne Michael Thurston.

Let me just say a couple of things in response to what Michael mentioned initially. First it is true that I am a recovering lawyer. I have told a few people this before but when you're a lawyer you don't get a lot of love – people tend to put lawyers down and I did not realize I could actually fall further on the food chain until I became a diplomat.

In fact John Adams, who was one of the founders of the American republic and a great leader once said that after years of experience he had concluded that one useless person was a shame, two was a law firm, and three or more was a diplomatic corps. So I'll just tell one quick story from my life as a diplomat. What I was told during my diplomatic training was that the hardest part of diplomacy is the last three feet - the distance of a handshake - and I was just back in the White House visiting with other Ambassadors. We had a Chief of Mission conference for all the Ambassadors around the world, and I visited with the President and I went and saw the National Security Advisor on my way out. I discovered something I hadn't realized, which is that when you're the Vice President of the United States, you don't have your own private bathroom. There is a bathroom outside the National Security Advisors Office, that apparently he uses because the door opened and out walked Vice President Biden. And he was doing that sort of thing you do after you've not perfectly dried your hands and he goes “Hey Jeff – how are ya?” This is the most difficult part of diplomacy! “Fine, Mr. Vice President”. But the one thing that followed from that conversation was he immediately leapt into the issues that



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

Australia is facing. He talked about the floods, the cyclones, the bush fires in Perth. He asked about how things were going with a one person majority in Parliament and the first minority government since the 1940s. And he hadn't been briefed and I hadn't raised these.

These came directly from him, and it reinforced for me just how important the U.S. Australian relationship is. That it is front and center, even on a day that when Egypt was erupting in riots – that he was so fully briefed, so fully aware and so completely concerned about our relationship. I often say we have no better friend in the world than Australia and when I said this recently with my counterpart Kim Beazley, who is the - as you know – the Australian Ambassador to the U.S. – Kim in typical fashion said 'Well that's kind of a cost free thing to say. It's not like you're saying you like us less than anyone else – but you're not saying you like us anymore'. And so let me just say this. Australia is our best friend in the world. We just don't want to tick off all of our other friends.

As Michael mentioned when AIIA invited me to speak tonight, they didn't offer a specific topic other than what he said - which is I address quote "Global Issues of Current Concern." And it says something about the times we live in, that if I'd really taken them up on that offer and talked about the global issues of current concern, we'd all still be here until breakfast tomorrow. If you just think about the few months alone, we've had popular revolts ignite in Tunisia and in Egypt. We've seen terror attacks in Russia. We've seen these vast natural disasters all over the world, including the terrible floods, cyclones, and fires that came after historic droughts here in Australia. We've seen great markets like those of Europe's falter and struggle, and we've seen once poor nations in Asia soar in their GDP, and all of these are global events that command our attention.

But as I reflected on those events, and tried to choose among them there was one global concern that seemed to influence or affect every one of them – and that is the internet.

The internet has played, and it will play, a major part in each of these issues and in every great social issue of our time. It is unlike anything that we've ever seen before. It is not just a means of communication; it is now our principal means of education, communication, it's now our principal means of entertainment and media, it's our principal form of infrastructure in terms of laying cables and setting up satellites, and it has become the principal channel of commerce – all in one. And so it has the power, like all great technological innovations to do great good but it also can be a force of tremendous harm.

We see it in some of the events that I just mentioned, and as I hope to address tonight, in the recent WikiLeaks controversy. Let me talk about the examples first – talk about the revolt in Tunisia which I know a number of people are interested in. The revolt in



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

Tunisia was not caused by the – I know you hear the media saying “it’s a Facebook revolution, it’s a twitter revolution”. Revolutions are caused by the things that always caused revolutions – it’s oppression, it’s repression, it’s inequality, it’s lack of opportunity, and a government that simply loses touch with the basic needs of its citizens. But the internet and social media did have a profound effect on the revolt and potentially will have a profound effect on its aftermath. Social media in particular dramatically accelerated the pace of the revolution – things that normally would take six, 12, 18 months to occur – where diplomats would be hearing the beat of the drums and writing cables back home- took only six weeks, and so it caught world leaders off guard and it caught the movement itself by surprise. Another thing about the impact of the internet is that ... Who in this room? It’s AIIA, this is a terrific group of thinkers around the world, or around Australia, who are familiar with issues around the world – who was the leader of the Tunisian revolution? Anyone want to take a guess? I asked the U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia – who was the leader of the Tunisian revolution – and I hope you feel good about yourselves because he had the same answer – no one. It didn’t require a clear, charismatic leader. There were affinity groups who were reaching out through social media, and that means there is no well organized opposition that was formed with a leader and a message so the full effects of this are yet to be determined. At the very least the internet served as a positive vehicle for accelerating democracy but the lingering question is whether it accelerated events faster than our democratic processes can absorb them.

I’ll talk briefly about terrorism. Although the terror attacks most recently in Russia were a bombing, increasingly, the great battlefield in the war with terrorists is online. On the positive side, the ability to detect and to prevent terror attacks depends more and more upon the internet and cellular technology. We’re able to find people and stop terrorist threats because of our capabilities on the internet, but on the other hand the great terror targets – our power grids, our financial markets, our defense systems – they are all online. So we’re depending on the internet to stop terrorists, but we are also exposed and we’re made more vulnerable to terrorists because of the internet.

Finally, let me just say a word about natural disasters because obviously they are on our minds and should be on our minds. Internet, cellular networks, they’ve created a means for good. For warning people, for sheltering people, raising money to assist them, and to mobilize at unprecedented rates. Lives were saved here in Australia because of the ability to send messages to people who were in the path of the devastating waters, and winds, and fires. And just to give one example from around the world - in Haiti, when we had the earthquake recently, there was three people in the U.S. State Department who came up with a five digit text number that people could use. They did it within 24 hours of the earth quake – and if you texted in those five digits, 10 dollars would go to Haiti relief. They raised \$35 million in a few days from that technology. So for me the internet



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

is generally a force for good, but it is also something we need to be aware of where it can be harmful.

And as a diplomat, I think the most immediate example of both the power of internet communications and its potential for harm, is in the recent theft of diplomatic cables and their alleged dissemination on the web.

You know, one of the reasons I became a diplomat, after having a very good career as a lawyer that I enjoyed, was because I believe in diplomacy. I believe that it is better to anticipate problems, to negotiate before conflict arises, and to resolve our disputes peacefully. And the internet has created an extraordinary way for diplomats to do this. Today I can quickly share sensitive information, I can assess almost immediately when something dangerous may be developing, and I can work around the globe with counterparts to defuse those situations. However, that same technology that allows me to do all of that has risks. If that electronic information that we're sharing gets stolen, it can be sent rapidly to undermine peace. It can give hostile governments and criminals critical insights. It can pre-empt or even derail peace negotiations and discussions. And it can discourage the kind of honest exchanges that we depend on. Now the recent theft of classified information from the U.S. Government – and the decision by certain groups to post that information on the web - has already had an unprecedented and in many ways a negative effect on diplomacy; not just for the U.S. but for players all over the world. For that reason, and I think because the story has produced such strong opinions here in Australia, I want to address it here tonight.

Now I am going to make this personal. I devoted a long portion of my career to challenging government secrecy. A large part of my career was unsealing government records and lifting gag orders. I did this before I became a diplomat so I don't come at this issue with any knee-jerk position. Now as a diplomat, I obviously have a responsibility to my nation, but that doesn't mean that I am going to ignore the facts or opposing viewpoints. So I want to be absolutely crystal clear on two points that I fear were been lost in this avalanche of commentary that the WikiLeaks story has engendered.

The first is the U.S. bears responsibility for this theft. The U.S. government is absolutely responsible for protecting its classified information, and so we bear full responsibility for this enormous security breach. We have to work to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again. At yet the same time, we can't overreact. We have to continue to share sensitive information with those who need it, both within our own government, and with other governments, including Australia's, in order to protect all of our security.

The second point is this - the concerns we have do not center on Julian Assange and they never should have. There have been individual Americans who have said reckless and irresponsible things about him in the wake of the first tranche of releases, but these



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

statements are completely at odds with the actions and the policy of the United States and we repudiate them. Every person, every person is entitled to due process of law.

Our position is simple: the unauthorized release of classified information is a crime. The person who is responsible for this crime in this case served in the U.S. Military, has been charged with illegally downloading classified information, and providing it illegally to people not authorized to receive it. And if the U.S. Department of Justice discovers that others aided or abetted that crime, it should and it no doubt will seek to prosecute those persons but only in accord with due process, only if there is a presumption of innocence until proven guilty, and only if every other protection that the U.S. justice system guarantees is honored, and to date, absolutely no such legal action has been taken by the U.S. government against any one; and no action will be taken unless the facts and the law support it. So the storyline of a U.S. Government campaign to persecute any person or group simply has no basis in fact.

The question I raise tonight though goes well beyond any one person or group or legal investigation. And that question is this: regardless of who does it and regardless whether it violates the law, does the release of hundreds of thousands of these documents serve the public interest? Now the latest polling I've seen here in Australia shows about three-quarters of the population thinks it is good and they support what WikiLeaks is doing. And I think I heard from just about every single one of those people when I published an op-ed in "The Age" last December. Another great advantage of the internet – everyone can find my email address!

Now some of that may be due to the fact that the founder of WikiLeaks is Australian, and that the initial reaction from some American pundits was, as I mentioned, it was very personal, it was overblown, and full of anger without first making the case for why people were angry. So let me try to address some of the arguments that I've heard now in the press, and on the , in my email, in casual conversations and say what I wish had been said from the outset.

First, some people who champion the idea of putting classified information on the because they believe simply that the governments should not be classifying information and that by exposing classified information, you know, we strike a blow for transparency and for freedom of expression, and we make a better world.

Now, the first problem with this argument is that freedom of expression has never meant that all information must or should be expressed. If you falsely yell "fire" in a crowded theater and people are trampled, that's not striking a blow for freedom of expression and transparency. It's just a dangerous and irresponsible act. If you reveal the positions of troops to hostile forces, that's not freedom of expression. That's treason.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

A lot of people here are from AmCham [American Chamber of Commerce in Australia]. I saw about thirty or forty AmCham members here, someone takes your business plans and posts them on the web, so that your competitors can see them, that's not freedom of expression – it's sabotage of your company. If I take someone's diary or I take their personal photographs and I put them up on the web, I'm not striking any blows for freedom of expression – I'm invading people's privacy. Some information just has to be kept private. Lawyers couldn't counsel their clients if they couldn't promise confidentiality. Doctors couldn't help their patients if they couldn't make the same promise. Journalists, journalists could not gather facts if they could not ensure the anonymity of some of their sources. Clergymen couldn't counsel members of their faith without some confidentiality.

And the same is true for governments. There will always be a need for governments to protect some sensitive information. And this is true of every government – it's not just the United States. Think about some of the things that you've provided to the government – your tax returns. Should people just put those up on the web? You ever been to a public hospital? Should that information go up on the web? If there are criminal investigations ongoing, or a threat to your security, do you really want that to go up on the web and tip off the people who are engaged in criminal activities or threats to your security? The fact that we limit some of this information doesn't change our commitment to free expression. It is part of our commitment to free expression. When you leak those documents through modern technology you're not advancing free expression, you're just multiplying the harm to other important values – privacy, security.

Well, now you also hear the argument that we'll somehow have a more open and honest society if all future recorded conversations and negotiations among diplomats are made public. I wish that were true but, the effect of WikiLeaks has shown just the opposite. In reality, if candid information and its sources are going to be revealed, people are going to be less candid. They're going to be less honest. They will tend to share less, they will tend to share with fewer people, and they will rarely make a written record of it. And this means a more closed society. It means a whole lot more decisions that are made on incomplete or distorted information, and it means fewer records of the reasoning behind decisions that our government makes.

Now another problem with this, you know – I'm a child of the seventies 'let it all hang out' – belief is that it ignores the fact that not all information for all nations is actually 'hanging out'. In fact, information from all nations will never all be accessible. The great irony here is that, to date, WikiLeaks has targeted the diplomatic communications of open societies of some of the most transparent and democratically accountable governments in the world, some of the strongest champions of free speech, and transparency, and good governance. Why? Because WikiLeaks can't get access to



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

information from closed, repressed, brutal societies. Those societies have shut down the flow of information. So in effect this approach all it's doing is placing open societies at a great disadvantage versus closed and repressive societies.

Now I agree with the WikiLeaks on one thing. They have a point that some U.S. government information is probably over-classified. It's a natural impulse when you're not sure, to over-classify. But what's the solution to that? Is the solution to allow every person who comes into possession of stolen information to decide for themselves whether to put it on the web? Every government official to decide for themselves, do you want you know the person at the post office to decide maybe I'll open this letter and put it on the web - I think it's important for the public to know, I think these medical records should go up, I think your tax returns – people would be interested in this. There are legal ways to declassify and get access to U.S. Government documents that have been over-classified. And that's what I did as a lawyer, I did it over and over again, and I can tell you it's a little bit of work, but it works. Between the two choices of having a process that's controlled by democratic principles and a process where any unelected, unaccountable person who gets stolen information gets to decide – neither one is perfect but I think we should be much more afraid of the latter.

Now the crimes that allowed WikiLeaks to get a hold of stolen information and the efforts by certain sites and organizations to capitalize on this, in my view they aren't making us freer, they're doing just the opposite.

And that leads me to the third argument I've seen which is that no one has actually been hurt by the release of these documents. We should be very clear on this – that's absolutely false. The release of this information has put hundreds of people at risk. We're working very hard – this is something that I've been working on personally – to protect individuals who have shared information about repressive governments, about nuclear proliferation, and who are now at risk and we're working to mitigate the damage that's done by those disclosures.

The problem is you can't talk about the individual cases, because then you just increase the risk to those people. But you know there are some things you have probably already seen in the papers and so I can refer to those. Seeing how releasing supposed cables may have destabilized the power-sharing relationship in Zimbabwe. And you've got Robert Mugabe who's using supposed cables as a way of undermining the man who actually won the 2008 election and putting people in jail.

And really, just as a practical matter, you know, when we put ourselves in the real world, does anyone think that exposing communications that are shared in confidence about negotiating positions will actually help, rather than undermine, things like delicate peace negotiations? All the business people here from AmCham - when you're negotiating, do



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

you think ‘you know, this would go a lot better if the other side knew what my true bottom line was’? And these are serious issues. Think about where we have peace negotiations going on today: Israel, Palestine, Cyprus, Korea, Sudan. Does revealing those negotiating positions really help them find a peaceful solution, does revealing negotiating positions advance multilateral agreements to stop nuclear proliferation and some of the other complex issues that we have? Does it help our efforts to support people who actually dare to speak out against human rights abuses in Burma?

We can’t be naïve about these things. I’m absolutely certain, and have basis for certainty, that members of Al-Qaida, members of Al-Shabab, the Taliban, as well as the secret police of every single authoritarian government in power today, are pouring over these cables. They’re pouring over each and every released document so they can identify people who they think might be sources of information, and so they can piece together intelligence that will be used – perhaps now, perhaps a month from now, perhaps a year down the road – to identify vulnerabilities for attacks on citizens or interests, not just of the of the United States but of Australia, our allies and partners with who we share information.

They will use this to hunt down political or religious dissidents. They will use it to eliminate threats to their own hold on power. You just can’t underestimate their savvy. I know people always think ‘Oh you know government’s always, you know, putting out these scary tactics’. Let me give you something concrete - why haven’t we caught Osama Bin Laden? Why haven’t we located him? There’s been a world-wide manhunt for this individual for years. It’s not because we’re not trying, it’s because these people are extremely technologically savvy and they will squeeze as much value as they can out of this or any other tool that drops into their laps courtesy of any party, including WikiLeaks.

So that brings me to my final point, and then I’ll open it up for questions. Over the past decade or so the U.S. has sometimes been criticized, by Americans and by foreigners, for our perceived tendency to resort to military solutions first rather than exhausting every possible peaceful option. And frankly, that sort of criticism has been loudest among those of us who advocate for civil liberties.

The release of these cables impairs our ability to solve disagreements peacefully through diplomatic discussions and to stop conflict from happening. If people are unwilling to share with me their candid thoughts behind closed doors, discussions between government will be ultimately little more than what you see in some countries, which is just this kind of contrived exchange of cleared talking points between State Departments and foreign ministers . In that environment, not only is it difficult to get anything done, it’s difficult to avoid the kinds of serious misunderstandings and miscalculations that can



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

grow into conflicts. If we want a stable, if we want a more peaceful world, hamstringing diplomacy just isn't the way to do it.

No one – no one is more concerned about civil liberties or protection of our fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, than I am; nor is there anyone more concerned about ensuring the safety of not just the United States but all of its great allies including Australia and our partners around the world. This is going to require our using technology, and our trusting one another. It is going to require honesty between us, and it's going to require some restraint in what we share and what we hold. We need to be smart about not sacrificing our safety or our values, and I have very grave concerns that in the rush to embrace the internet in all aspects our governance, WikiLeaks has just gone too far and they have endangered some of those sacred freedoms.

Now I don't expect that I've convinced everyone in this room, but I hope I've at least caused us all to think about the hazards associated with this, and to be more judicious and more questioning about positions that we may have already formed in our minds. And that's our challenge, and ultimately it's our choice, and I just hope we all take the wisest course. Thank you.

[QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION]

MICHAEL MACKELLAR: Thank you very much indeed, Ambassador. That was one of the most instructive and challenging speeches I've heard for years, and it's a challenge for all of us here to ask questions without making speeches – that's the challenge that I'm putting to you folk. Please, the Ambassador has kindly said that he will answer some questions, but when you ask your questions, please don't make a speech – just ask a question.

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Or also just say 'I take that as a comment' (laughter).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Your Excellency, I'm most unqualified to give a question. My application for membership of the AIIA has only just been put in, but I'm a proud AmCham member, David Perry.

AMBASSADOR: Well, David, you run a great hotel and I'm actually staying at The Windsor – so I probably just got in trouble with my AFP detail. I won't say where in The Windsor, or which Windsor in Australia (laughter), but you're obviously qualified. Please go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'd like to thank you for that most provoking presentation, and I know the State Department will have fixed any security breaches that you may have, and I know you're a great advocate for freedom of the internet, and I know that WikiLeaks



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

have started to delete names... I'm speaking in front of Prime Minister Fraser... I like that protocol. So the pressure is on me.

The question I have is on Egypt. Whilst it might have taken six weeks for Tunisia, it seemed to take six days or six hours for Egypt, the bulwark friend of America. Was it joy that greeted the administration when the people took to the streets, or was it panic, and in which order did those emotions come? And what emotions are being held in Israel now, when the bulwark ally - is it being deserted or is it being supported? Was the Ambassador, ex-Ambassador sent off to Cairo to give Mubarak his marching orders, or was he there to tell (Michael MacKellar: 'That's about five questions') – I'm sorry. But Egypt – how critical is Egypt?

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Well, the United States has been very clear that our value is that democracy is good, and democracy means that the people of a nation get to select their leaders and select their government, and sometimes it's a government that we work very well with, and sometimes it's a government that we have challenges with, but that doesn't change our commitment, and when countries in the former Soviet Union moved towards democracy, we had the same attitude as when countries that are already democratic or are already allies move towards democracy; that democracy is good and it's up to those nations. What we have said is that, to the extent that the people of Egypt have spoken, we all have an interest – the United States as every other nation does – in ensuring that there's a peaceful and measured transition, and so we have offered our assistance to Egypt in helping them to work through the transition, but at the end of the day this is Egypt's decision who their leaders will be, and as I said, just as in Tunisia we have been pushing for political reforms in Egypt because if you have repression, if you have a loss of opportunity, if you are out of touch with your citizens, then this is inevitable – you will have uprisings and revolt and a change, and unfortunately the leadership in Egypt did not pursue the reforms that were available to it when it could have pursued them.

MICHAEL MACKELLAR: Down the back there. Could you wait 'til the microphone arrives?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sir, thank you very much for your insightful and thoughtful comments. One of the points that you made in your introduction was about the role of a diplomat in anticipating problems. I'm aware of reports in the last week that Pakistan has accelerated its production of fissile material of a weapons grade, and indeed, prudent observers have suggested that Pakistan may have overtaken the United Kingdom in terms of numbers of operational nuclear weapons, and consequently there's a risk that India may respond. I'm intrigued, and I would appreciate your comments on the leverage that the United States is exercising or can exercise in restraining such activities by Pakistan,



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

given, without going into a lengthy background to it as no doubt everyone here is aware, the intrinsic instability in Pakistan in particular, and indeed the implicit threat that extremist forces may, sooner rather than later, take control of that country?

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Well, it's a very good question. In terms of the underlying facts, one thing that I have developed a strong confidence in, in doing this job, and I think the Prime Minister might agree with me, is that you can't rely too much on what you see in the papers. In terms of things that talk about intelligence, there are always people who want to plant stories because it's in their interest to create concerns or fears. What I can say though is that Pakistan is one of the more complex, challenging and important relationships that we have in the world, and to the extent that the issue is 'Are we committed to nuclear non-proliferation?', absolutely. We've done more in this administration in the first year and half than has been accomplished in the last forty years in nuclear non-proliferation (applause). And I can go through what those steps are but I think apparently some people in the room are already familiar. And I think the second point is we do exercise our leverage with nations to ensure that they pursue non-proliferation. I think in Pakistan today, we probably are providing more on a per capita basis in terms of aid and development than any other nation in the world. I think last I heard was we had a \$1.5 billion aid package annually to Pakistan, in part because of all the challenges you described, so we are putting our treasure where our values are.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you very much, Ambassador. And thank you for establishing that lapsed lawyers can go on to lead very satisfying and compelling careers. Thank you so much. A crisp and simple question. I hear your convincing argument that WikiLeaks went too far. Do you have any views on the media who published WikiLeaks' material?

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Yeah, I think that is one of the challenging questions. There are different standards that are applied by certain media organizations. They behave differently. One thing is they subscribe to codes of conduct and ethics that bloggers or other organizations that are operating exclusively on the web don't necessarily share. There are no codes of ethics or codes of conduct that exist. But all the newspapers that have published some of these are subscribing members. Another thing is they tend to work with governments and to the extent that there is a concern that they are putting people in harm's way, they will advise in advance and try and make specific accommodations so that they can report the news but also not create news. So there are differences, but there are also similarities and I think that is one of the challenges.

MICHAEL MACKELLAR: In a break with tradition just for a moment, the new Ambassador would like to ask a question.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Your Excellency! I keep trying to get my kids to call me that and they won't.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay. My question. I am completely in agreement with you – as a former lawyer and a diplomat. Now, personal question. I am very confident of the reports that I sent to Turkey that, let's say after ten years, I wouldn't have any problem that they would be published. Personally, after how many years you would be content your reports would be published?

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Well, you know, we have the same rules. Nothing – there is no such thing as a secret, there's only delayed disclosure (laughter). And I think we all live with that. The question is how long is the delay? Most of the things that we classify are classified for ten years or less for precisely that reason. It's not that government has to keep secrets forever, it's that during sensitive periods there has to be some limit on the disclosure. You know, the example I give with my kids – because I've got teenagers who've asked about the very same issue. They've asked about WikiLeaks. They said, well, what's the harm? And I said well, think about how we behave. Do you express every thought that you have at Christmas dinner in front of the entire family? You know? What you do is you make judgments about what to share, when to share it, with whom to share it. And you have to make those sorts of discretionary judgments. The U.S. – I am very comfortable with everything that I have ever done in public life being open to my children and my grandchildren – I just don't want it open to, you know, today's enemies.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Just as a first thing, I worked with the U.S. military in southeast Afghanistan and just want to extend my humble respect for all those U.S. servicemen and women that I worked with there. They're a fantastic group of people. I got some great friends as a result of that experience. My question's actually your thoughts in relation to Australia's position between China where our prosperity is largely tied to economically vis-a-vis our utmost critical relationship with the United States and where there are sometimes tensions between those three partners, or between two of them, how you see Australia's role in that and do you see us playing an increasing role between China and the U.S. relationship? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: No, thank you. And first thank you for your service. The commitment of Australians particularly what I've seen in Afghanistan has just been overwhelming. Australia – for those who don't know – is the largest contributor of troops outside of NATO to the ISAF forces, and in Oruzgan province they are mentoring and training Afghans to take responsibility for their own destiny. You've been wonderful ambassadors for democracy and for Australia. So thank you for your sacrifice.

With respect to U.S.-China-Australia – you know, this is one of these issues that has gotten very excited and heated recently and I don't know if it's just because people need



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

to find something to get excited and heated about. Or it might be because it's something unique for Australia. It has traditionally been the case that Australia's key economic partner and its key security partner has been the same nation. That was true with the UK and then it was true with the United States, and for the first time the United States is the key security partner for Australia, but the largest trade partner for Australia is China and it's grown. Now that doesn't mean that it's, you know, the only economic partner. The U.S. is the number three trade partner and the largest investor in Australia of any nation and the largest destination for investment, but it does create for the first time something new. And I think people are concerned about how that will play out and how the United States and China's relationship could potentially affect the security of Australia – particularly could its economic interests in China in some way compromise its security interests with the United States. The United States and China – we don't see this as a zero sum game. The United States has been responsible for too long for too much of the world's security. It is a tremendous burden. It's a tremendous cost and it's difficult. We want more partners who are prosperous, engaged, strong and responsible to work with us in some of these challenging areas. So we are in constant dialogue with China on an enormous number of issues. Now the media always picks on the two or three issues where there is significant disagreement – whether it's currency rates or Taiwan or the Dalai Lama – it doesn't focus on the hundred and fifty issues on which we are finding common ground and working very well together. Our view is that China should continue to rise and grow and take people out of poverty and be an engaged partner in the world. And we want to maintain our own presence because we are deeply and unabashedly committed to being a predominant force in the Asia-Pacific – simply because we're a Pacific country. You know – our largest state, our wealthiest state, our most mineral-rich state, our newest state – they're all either on the Pacific or in the Pacific. We are a Pacific nation so we have just as much at stake in the Asia-Pacific as any other Asian partner, and we're committed to being here and working with Australia and all of our other allies and partners in this region.

MICHAEL MACKELLAR: You had your hand up.

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thanks very much for your exposition of WikiLeaks. I enjoyed that very much. But we have no WikiLeaks on what's going on in Egypt. I'm sorry to bring you back to this. But we have three statements over time from the United States. First of all, I think Secretary Clinton saying 'really the United States supports Mubarak'. Then a week later we have another statement which says 'really we want a peaceful transition for Mubarak to disappear'. And then more recently we have 'yeah, he's gotta go, he's gotta go, he's gotta go quickly'. This gives the impression to the world, in the absence of WikiLeaks, that the United States is making policy on the hoof.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy

AMBASSADOR BLEICH: You know, I don't think that's an accurate characterization of the U.S. positions that were articulated either by the Secretary or by the State Department spokesman. I know some of the media have tried to characterize it as, you know, 'the U.S. is trying to figure out its position'. We are in uncharted territory because Egypt has had the same government for thirty years. The people of Egypt are in uncharted territory in terms of deciding what they want to do. But we've been consistent from the beginning. Our first response to complaints was to reiterate what we have said all along, which is the Mubarak regime needs to engage in political reform and address these concerns. When the public demanded that he step down, we said, again, he needs to make the reforms and if the people of Egypt want a different leader, they should have a different leader and we are not going to interfere with that. And in terms of the timing of it, we haven't said he needs to leave now, he must leave today. What we've said is that there must be an orderly transition and we want to work with partners around the world, not sort of handing down telling Egypt how to do things, but work with others to help Egypt have its transition in an orderly fashion that doesn't result in the kinds of things that you should be worried about. People say 'orderly transition', they say 'well you're just delaying, you're doing this, you're doing that'. In Cairo today, prisons are just, you know, thrown open. You have hoodlums, hooligans, dangerous people who have been in jail for good reasons – not just political prisoners – people who are bad, people running amok. That's something that everyone should be concerned about. You want order in transition, not because of order for order's sake, but because it's very dangerous if you just have this kind of chaotic change in leadership. So what we've said is anything that we can do to help, we'd like to help, and we'd like to work with other partners around the world to do that.

ENDS

###