World braces for WikiLeaks flood of US cables

November 28 2010, by Shaun Tandon

Governments around the world on Saturday braced for the release of millions of potentially embarrassing US diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks as Washington raced to contain the fallout.

Governments around the world on Saturday braced for the release of millions of potentially embarrassing US diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks as Washington raced to contain the fallout.

The whistle-blower website is expected to put online three million leaked cables covering US dealings and confidential views of countries including Australia, Britain, Canada, Israel, Russia and Turkey.

US diplomats skipped their Thanksgiving holiday weekend and headed to foreign ministries hoping to stave off anger over the cables, which are internal messages that often lack the niceties diplomats voice in public.

An independent French website reported that the leaks would be published simultaneously at 2130 GMT Sunday by several Western newspapers.

The website, owni.fr, in October launched an interface allowing the public to search, rate and comment on the Iraq war logs, the last major Wikileaks release.

It said the New York Times, Britain's The Guardian, Germany's Der Spiegel, the Spanish El Pais and France's Le Monde would release their first analysis of the documents, but "we expect some leaks before this time," the website's owner told AFP.

The website said Der Spiegel had published the number of documents Saturday afternoon for a few minutes before removing them, saying the release would include 251,287 diplomatic cables, including 16,652 marked "secret."

The top US military commander, Admiral Mike Mullen, urged WikiLeaks to stop its "extremely dangerous" release of documents, according to a transcript of a CNN interview set to air Sunday.

US Admiral Mike Mullen gives a press conference in Baghdad, July 2010. Governments around the world braced for the release of millions of potentially

embarrassing US diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks as Washington raced to contain the fallout.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had contacted leaders in Germany, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Britain, France and Afghanistan over the issue, he added.

WikiLeaks has not specified the documents' contents or when they would be put online, but a Pentagon spokesman said officials were expecting a release "late this week or early next week."

The website has said there would be "seven times" as many secret documents as the 400,000 Iraq war logs it published last month.

In London, the government urged British newspaper editors to "bear in mind" the national security implications of publishing any of the files.

British officials said some information may be subject to voluntary agreements between the government and the media to withhold sensitive data governing military operations and the intelligence services.

A heavy machine-gun belonging to the Afghan National Army is seen at dawn at

a base in Kandahar province. Governments around the world braced for the release of millions of potentially embarrassing US diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks as Washington raced to contain the fallout.

Russia's respected Kommersant newspaper said that the documents included US diplomats' conversations with Russian politicians and "unflattering" assessments of some of them.

Turkish media said they include papers suggesting that Ankara helped Al-Qaeda militants in Iraq, and that the United States helped Iraq-based Kurdish rebels fighting against Turkey -- potentially explosive revelations for the two allies.

The US embassy "gave us information on the issue, just as other countries have been informed," a senior diplomat in Ankara told AFP.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who traveled to Washington on Saturday for previously scheduled talks with Clinton, said Turkey did not know what the documents contained.

Israel has also been warned of potential embarrassment from the latest release, Haaretz newspaper said, citing a senior Israeli official.

Officials in Canada, Australia, Britain, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden said they had been contacted by US diplomats regarding the release.

Australia on Saturday condemned the whistle-blower website, saying the "reckless" disclosure could endanger individuals named in the documents as well as the national security interests of the United States and its allies.

US officials have not confirmed the source of the leaked documents, but suspicion has fallen on Bradley Manning, a former army intelligence agent.

VIDEO - WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange said Saturday that 400,000 classified US military documents leaked by the whistleblowing website showed the "truth" on the Iraq war. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has condemned the leaks for putting the lives of Americans at risk. Duration: 01:38

He was arrested after the earlier release of a video showing air strikes that killed civilian reporters in Baghdad.

Wired magazine said Manning confessed to the leaks during a webchat in May. He was quoted as saying he acted out of idealism after watching Iraqi police detain men for distributing a "scholarly critique" against corruption.

WikiLeaks argues that the first two document dumps -- US soldier-authored incident reports from 2004 to 2009 -- shed light on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, including allegations of torture by Iraqi forces and reports that suggested 15,000 additional civilian deaths in Iraq.

WikiLeaks is the project of Australian hacker Julian Assange. Sweden

recently issued an international warrant for his arrest, saying he is wanted for questioning over allegations of rape and sexual molestation.

(c) 2010 AFP