

Printed version

Page: [01](#) [02](#) [03](#) [04](#) [05](#) [06](#) [07](#) [08](#) [09](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [Back to home](#)

EDITORIAL

Leaking controversies

THE INFORMATION LEAKED OUT FROM WIKILEAKS is no less "disturbing" (as the Department of Foreign Affairs have described) because of the sensitivity of the secret cables that are being divulged and published by the website. Among the thousands of the confidential files concerning the Philippines that were made public by the site Julian Assange had founded, some of them showed surprising messages that could possibly affect the diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the United States. Though the authenticity of the information is yet to be confirmed as the US Embassy in Manila still keeps mum on the issue, it has raised valid questions as to the real status of the relationship between the two countries behind closed doors, especially during the Arroyo administration.

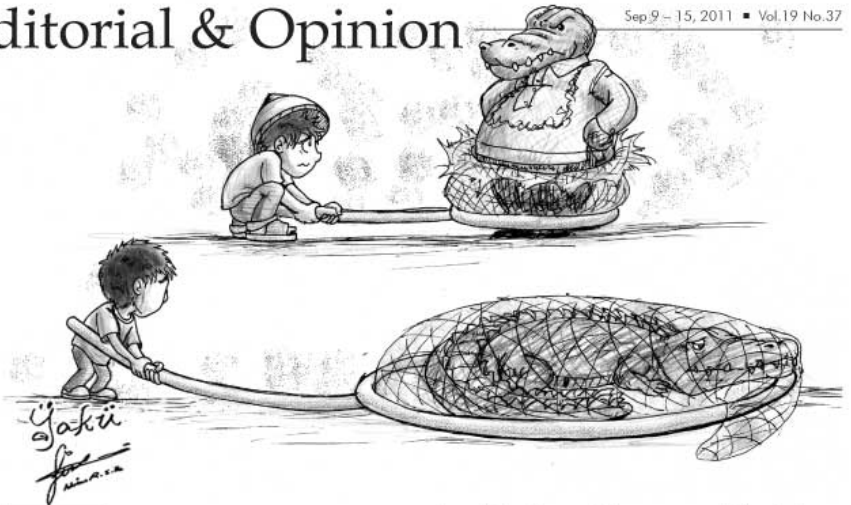
Among the most disturbing is the leaked cable that the United States had vested interest in the lands the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) tried to claim as their own apart from Philippine territory. Bayan Muna Representative Satur Ocampo said the late MILF chief Hashim Salamat had sought assistance from then US Pres. George W. Bush through a letter dated Jan 20, 2003 to ink an agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF on the creation of a Moro homeland. The pact however, known as the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2008.

The party-list lawmaker said that US interest was evident from the terms of the MOA-AD where the funding for socio-economic projects in Mindanao would be handed over to the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The lawmaker said Salamat's letter for Bush to intervene led initially to the US Institute for Peace's interest in Mindanao and then the direct intervention of the US Embassy, then led by US Ambassador Kristie Kenney, a few years later as exposed in the Wikileaks reports.

Another leak that came out was the unflattering cables dispatched by Kenney in 2009 during the Arroyo administration, saying that the late president Corazon Aquino had a weak leadership. The data upset the present government helmed by the younger Aquino.

Though the two secret cables revealed by Wikileaks above—along with many others involving former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and other top level Philippine leaders—had already caused quite a stir in Philippine politics, their authenticity is yet to be validated. Yet even so, the publication of sensitive leaked data is dangerous. There is a big possibility that the surfaced secret information has already produced tiny cracks in the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

While ordinary people had benefitted from "taking a peek" at the closed door meetings of US diplomats through Wikileaks, the cost could outweigh the benefits. Bits of information cannot give us the real score behind the matter. Instead, these unauthorized data may even cause misunderstandings that could start bigger problems in the future. With the emergence of Wikileaks, the US government should protect its data more. Otherwise, these leaks could cause severe damages and outright misinterpretations, not only internally but also toward its diplomatic "alliances."



The Elder's View

Abe P. Mojica

Of chopsticks and 'fortune' cookies

DO YOU KNOW THAT CHOPSTICKS are not of Chinese origin? In the rice bowl cultures of China, Japan and Korea, as well as of Vietnam, people eat with chopsticks. Contrary to popular belief, chopsticks did not even originate from Asia. During the Middle Ages, aristocrats often favored silver chopsticks since it was thought that silver would turn color if it came into contact with poison.

Sometimes chopsticks are quite artistic. Chopsticks can be made of lacquered wood and covered with artwork. Some are even made of gold and embossed in silver with

Chinese calligraphy. Artisans also combine various hardwoods and metal to create distinctive designs. Chopsticks may be totally smooth or carved or modeled ripples. Silver or gold point can be used to give them a rough texture. In Thailand, wood is often elaborately carved into chopsticks. The ends of chopsticks can be rounded or squared, while the tips can be blunt or sharp.

Fortune Cookies

Actually, it is only when you eat in Chinese restaurants, or in eateries also serving Chinese food, that at the end of the meal, 'for-

tune cookies' are thrown on tables. When cracked, they usually yield strips of paper, foretelling ones future or lucky numbers.

It is claimed that fortune cookies are, in fact, an American invention. They originated in California, but who the inventor was, and in which city in California may be the true home of the fortune cookie, nobody would hazard a guess.

There is, of course, a story that one David Jung, a Chinese immigrant residing in Los Angeles, and who was also the founder of the Hong Kong Noodle Company, invented the cookie in 1918. The cookie used to be given away free to the poor who frequented the streets where the factory was situated. Each cookie contained a strip of paper with an inspirational message, originally written by a Presbyterian minister, for Jung.

Still another claim, stated that the fortune cookie was invented in San Francisco by a Japanese immi-

grant named Makoto Hagiwara, a gardener, who designed the famous Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park.

Hagiwara was fired from his job around the turn of the century, but later on a new mayor reinstated him. Grateful to those who had stood by him during his period of hardship, Hagiwara created a cookie in 1914 that included a thank you note inside. This was passed around and later the strip contained predictions or news of good fortune.

Today, restaurant patrons expectantly look forward to these cookies with messages that invariably foretell good tidings!

As a tribute to PMN's former Chairman and Editor-in-Chief Abelardo P. Mojica, this space will continue to publish his past columns. "Ating Abe" passed away peacefully on the morning of November 13th, 2009.



Viewpoints

Fe P. Koons

Toxic wastes in Clark and Subic

ON SEPTEMBER 16, A FORUM will be held at the Pilipino Worker Center in Los Angeles to inform the Filipino community about the recent findings of unexploded ordnance in Clark. Recently, several bullets and harmful weapons were found by children. The sites were those left by the US military in Clark.

The cleanup of the toxic wastes left behind by the US military is a long struggle of the families in Clark and Subic. For one thing, the Philippine Senate has long rejected the resumption of the RP-US bases treaty and yet the US government has refused to take the moral responsibility of cleaning the sites. The sites have been sources of ill health among the children and families in Pampanga where ailments have occurred because of a January 1992 report by the US General Accounting Office (GAO) revealed that the US military had failed to comply with its own environmental standards in its bases in the Philippines.

As a consequence, cleaning-up the damage left behind in both bases could reach Superfund proportions. Subsequent studies include evidence suggesting severe environmental contamination, and potential for associated health risks for communities, in both bases. The Philippine government, which has undertaken extensive efforts to convert the former bases into flagship economic centers, commissioned environmental baseline studies in Clark and Subic to assess the actual extent of contamination. The Clark study, conducted by Weston International, found, among

that the underground aquifers that supply drinking water in and around the base are contaminated. The wells are all located near or down-gradient of the golf course. The dieldrin found in the wells may be the breakdown product of aldrin, a pesticide which may have been used in the golf course.

- High levels of aldrin, dieldrin, lindane, chlordane, heptachlor, and HCB were also found in the soil samples from several sites. The sample sites include a municipal landfill near a residential area in the town of Malabac, an abandoned motor pool now used as a relocation site for evacuees of the Mt. Pinatubo volcanic eruption, the old fire training area, and the Civil Engineering Entomology center.
- Elevated levels of PCB in soil were detected in the decommissioned power plant and transformer sites, with one site recording a high of 7,800 parts per million (ppm).

Dr. Rosalie Bertell - President of the International Institute of Concern for Public Health (IICPH) - asserted that "the level of kidney diseases and symptoms of kidney problems reported in this area is startlingly high." The IICPH is monitoring the health of over 700 families living near Clark.

Unfortunately, the Philippines government has taken a lackadaisical approach to pushing the US to clean up the toxic wastes left behind by its forces. For instance, the Subic Bay Metropolitan Au-

study which was financed by a \$650,000 loan from the World Bank did not identify the widespread and severe contamination in the former naval base prompting Philippine base conversion authorities to describe the problem in Subic as "minimal". However, a subsequent review of the Woodward-Clyde study by Clearwater Revival Company (CRC), an American based environmental consulting firm with expertise in toxic waste remediation and base conversion issues, stated that "the [Woodward-Clyde] EBS does not accurately characterize contamination at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, and the potential for adverse impacts to human health and the environment." Describing the report as "terribly designed", Dr. Paul Bloom, a noted soil scientist with the United States Working Group for Philippine Bases Clean-up, said that the EBS "was an attempt to spend the most amount of money to produce the least amount of results."

There are many other omissions in the Woodward-Clyde study most of which are failures to investigate and account for recorded pollutive practices by the US Navy in Subic. Retired Admiral Eugene Carroll, a 37-year US Navy veteran who used to command US carriers and battle-ships into Subic admitted how the US Navy was "endlessly producing industrial toxic chemicals and discarding them without due regard for the pollution (in Subic)." In a 1992 article published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), Carroll recalls how the US Navy routinely flushed and left behind a trail of waste and toxic materials in the process of ship repair. The PCIJ article also revealed the double standard applied by the US, particularly in the use of PCBs in transformers a practice that had been

In 1994, health problems were beginning to be monitored in certain communities around Clark, particularly in CABCOM, a government evacuation center for people displaced by the explosion of Mt Pinatubo. The center was located atop a contaminated motor pool of the former air base.

People in CABCOM described the water as having a funny smell or an oily sheen. They also complained of skin irritation after bathing or washing, stomachs bloating to the size of a basketball, and unusual numbers of miscarriages and spontaneous abortions. In one small neighborhood, nine children were born with central nervous system problems; only one survived.

In response to these problems local community groups in 1994 initiated a health survey of 761 households in 13 communities around Clark. The results revealed that certain communities around Clark Air Force Base report conspicuously high levels of kidney, urinary, nervous and female system health problems.

According to Myria Baldonado of the Alliance for Bases Cleanup Philippines, the dangerous ordnance found recently showed that it is not safe for the children and families in the area. Baldonado also pointed out that many of the families continue to experience ill health due to exposure to dangerous toxic wastes in the area. Now is the time for the US government to take moral responsibility in cleaning up the toxic sites in Clark and Subic. What is unfair is how the government strictly implements environmental laws and requires the cleanup of toxic sites in the US and yet the government does not do the same thing outside of the United States. The US military should be responsible in cleaning up the toxic sites in the Philippines and clean up the mess it had left behind. For one thing, the chil-

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