

UNLIKE THE GUARDIAN, THE NYT TOLD STATE PRECISELY WHAT WIKILEAKS CABLES IT WOULD PUBLISH

The Guardian has now posted its version of the US government's efforts last November to learn what cables WikiLeaks would publish, so I'd like compare the three versions to show what we know.

As I noted before, these negotiations started with the NYT giving the State Department a heads up. Following that heads up, offered on November 19, some reporters met with representatives of the foreign policy and national security **and law enforcement** establishment on Tuesday, November 23. Following that, the NYT appears to have provided the State Department with copies of every single cable they planned to release.

Because of the range of the material and the very nature of diplomacy, the embassy cables were bound to be more explosive than the War Logs. Dean Baquet, our Washington bureau chief, gave the White House an early warning on Nov. 19. The following Tuesday, two days before Thanksgiving, Baquet and two colleagues were invited to a windowless room at the State Department, where they encountered an unsmiling crowd.

Representatives from the White House, the State Department, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the C.I.A., the Defense Intelligence Agency, **the F.B.I.** and the Pentagon gathered around a conference table. Others, who never identified themselves, lined the walls. A solitary note-taker tapped away on a computer.

The meeting was off the record, but it

is fair to say the mood was tense. Scott Shane, one reporter who participated in the meeting, described “an undertone of suppressed outrage and frustration.”

Subsequent meetings, which soon gave way to daily conference calls, were more businesslike. **Before each discussion, our Washington bureau sent over a batch of specific cables that we intended to use in the coming days. They were circulated to regional specialists,** who funneled their reactions to a small group at State, who came to our daily conversations with a list of priorities and arguments to back them up. We relayed the government’s concerns, and our own decisions regarding them, to the other news outlets. [my emphasis]

Der Spiegel suggests that after that November 23 meeting, at the same time NYT was meeting in person with the State Department, it was also making phone calls to the other partners involved.

The *New York Times* negotiated with the White House, and there were meetings and telephone calls with the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El País* and SPIEGEL. The US government had mustered a remarkable armada in its effort to appeal to the journalists. In addition to Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip Crowley and Clinton’s Chief of Staff Cheryl Mills, it included representatives of the CIA, the Pentagon and the office of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper – a reflection of the combined national security expertise of the most powerful nation in the world.

In addition, Ambassador to Germany Philip Murphy met with the newspaper in person on November 25.

This was also the approach taken by Philip Murphy, the American ambassador in Berlin, when we met with him at the United States Embassy. It was Thanksgiving Day, and Murphy drove from his residence in the Dahlem neighborhood to the embassy on Pariser Platz in downtown Berlin. At home, his wife Tammy and their four children were waiting for him to return for their traditional turkey dinner. Murphy, a former investment banker and national finance chair of the Democratic National Committee, wasn't wearing a suit that day. He donned a jacket, casual trousers and loafers. In addition to all of the foreign policy turmoil Julian Assange had created, he had also ruined Thanksgiving for the ambassador and his colleagues in Washington, an offence for which Murphy would never forgive him.

"I am mad about it, and I don't blame our brethren in the German government if they are mad, too, that someone has downloaded these documents," Murphy said. "I'm incredibly angry. I don't begrudge SPIEGEL and the press, who are just doing their jobs. I am criticizing those who stole this material."

The ambassador looked haggard. He coughed a lot and had to interrupt the conversation to get some water. Like so many American diplomats around the world, Murphy would have to explain to his foreign counterparts why the embassy's internal assessments of German politicians were so much harsher than its public statements. This is a challenge for diplomats, whose job requires them to preserve as perfect a façade as possible.

But Der Spiegel doesn't reveal whether it told State precisely what cables it would publish. Nor does it reveal whether it spoke with the

State Department directly.

Compare that to the Guardian's description, which reveals that under pressure from the US Embassy in London, Alan Rusbridger agreed to a conference call, which took place on November 26 (so after the NYT had started meeting daily with State and Murphy had met with Spiegel at their offices).

A few days before the cables' release, two senior figures from the US embassy in Grosvenor Square called in to the Guardian's London offices for a chat. This discussion led to a surreal transatlantic telephone call on Friday 26 November – two days before launch.

Alan Rusbridger agreed to ring Washington. He made the conference call from the circular table in his office. On the line was PJ Crowley, the US assistant secretary of state for public affairs.

The conversation began: "OK, here's PJ Crowley. I just want you to know in this phone call we've got Secretary of State Clinton's private secretary, we have representatives of the DoD [department of defence], the intelligence communities, and the national security council." All Rusbridger could offer in reply was: "We have our managing editor here."

Note, the reference to "intelligence communities, and the national security council" might well include the FBI; "representatives of the DoD" might include military criminal investigators. Thus it's possible – but by no means proven – that our government included those investigating the leak itself in meetings purportedly about editorial content.

The Guardian goes on to describe PJ Crowley and Hillary's private secretary trying to pressure the Guardian into revealing precisely what

cables they'd publish.

Crowley set out the view from the lofty heights of US power: "Obviously, from our perspective these are stolen documents. They reveal sensitive military secrets and addresses that expose people to security risks."

Crowley made his pitch. **He said the US government was "willing to help" the Guardian if it was prepared to "share the documents" it had – in other words, tip off the state department which cables it intended to publish.**

Rusbridger was noncommittal.

Clinton's private secretary chipped in. She said: "I've got a very direct question for you, Mr Rusbridger. You journalists like asking direct questions and I know you expect direct answers. So I'm going to ask you a direct question. **Are you going to give us the numbers of the cables or not?"**

"No, we're not."

"Thank you very much." [my emphasis]

The contrast between the NYT and the Guardian is instructive: the NYT sent over every cable they planned to publish. Whereas the Guardian refused to specify which cables they'd publish.

Under cover of off the record meetings with top national security officials, the NYT collaborated with the government, at the least on damage control, if not their investigation of WikiLeaks. The Guardian, by contrast, was unwilling to do more than warn State what general topics they'd cover on a day to day basis.

One other point: the fact that the government was asking newspapers precisely which cables they'd publish makes me wonder whether they didn't have – and may still not have, though given the numbers of copies floating around I

suspect they now know – a clear idea of which cables were included in the document dump. Geoff Morrell's press conference last week made it clear that they still only consider Bradley Manning a person of interest in the leak of the larger dump, meaning that if he leaked them, they haven't identified how he did so. But is it possible that – at least in November – they didn't even know what cables were included in the dump?