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WikiLeaks: Russia is 'mafia state'

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Russia is a virtual "mafia state" whose political parties operate "hand in hand" with organised crime, according to a US cable revealed by WikiLeaks, the whistle-blowing website.

In the memo, Jose Gonzalez, a senior Spanish prosecutor, told US officials that "he considers ... Russia to be a virtual 'mafia state'" where "one cannot differentiate between the activities of the government and organised crime groups".

Gonzalez, who has been investigating Russian organised crime in Spain for a decade, also agreed with poisoned dissident Alexander Litvinenko's thesis that Russian intelligence and security services "owned organised crime".

The memo, sent in February of this year from the US embassy in Madrid, is the latest revelation to appear since Sunday's online release of more than 250,000 US confidential and classified documents by WikiLeaks.

'Rogue security elements'

In a separate leaked cable, sent shortly after Litvinenko's death in London in 2006, Daniel Fried, US assistant secretary of state, questioned whether Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, knew beforehand of the plot to kill the dissident.

In a meeting with a senior French diplomatic adviser, Fried asked "whether rogue security elements could operate ... without Putin's knowledge," given the leader's "attention to detail".

Gonzalez also alleged there were "proven ties between the Russian political parties, organised crime and arms trafficking".

The cable relayed that Gonzalez believed Russian intelligence officials were behind the 2009 case of an Arctic Sea cargo ship which was suspected of carrying weapons destined for Iran.

In addition, the leaked cable suggested that Russian authorities used the mafia to carry out operations it could not "acceptably do as a government," citing the sale of arms to Kurds in order to destabilise Turkey as an example.

The document added the authorities took "the relationship with crime leaders even further by granting them the privileges of politics, in order to grant them immunity from racketeering charges".

Any crimelords who defied the country's Federal Security Service could be "eliminated" either by killing them or "putting them behind bars to eliminate them as a competitor for influence," Gonzalez said.

Far from being a localised problem, Gonzalez said he also thought the mafia virtually ran Belarus and Chechnya and exerted "tremendous control" over vital components of the global economy, including aluminum.

Haiti leak

Among other cables released by WikiLeaks on Wednesday is a leaked memo by a former US ambassador to Haiti saying Rene Preval's, the president, "overriding goal" ahead of last weekend's election for his successor was to ensure the new president would not force him into exile.

The June 2009 memo was sent under the name of then US ambassador Janet Sanderson.

Another leaked cable showed Washington believed that Yukiya Amano, the UN nuclear watchdog chief, was "solidly in the US court".

The US mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency, in a cable written after Amano was elected but before he took office in December 2009, described him as a "DG (director general) of all states, but in agreement with us".

It said Amano had reminded the US ambassador on several occasions that he would need to make concessions to developing countries, "but that he was solidly in the US court on

every key strategic decision, from high-level personnel appointments to the handling of Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program".

Clinton 'regrets'

Hillary Clinton , the US secretary of state, used a global summit in Kazakhstan on Wednesday to smooth ruffled feathers after the embarrassing revelations about world leaders that have continued to appear since Sunday.

A top US official told the AFP news agency that on the sidelines of talks at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe summit in Astana, the Kazhak capital, Clinton "brought it up herself, if they didn't bring it up, she did".

Clinton met one-on-one with Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister and Mikheil Saakashvili, the Georgian president.

"She wasn't shy about raising it. She was very clear that we regret that this has happened," said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"She was also clear, especially to the extent that any of them had concerns about the way it made them look in their own press."

The official said Clinton had explained that the cables came from US embassies around the world and were "not necessarily the view of the United States".