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CIA launches task force to assess impact of U.S. cables' exposure by WikiLeaks

By [Greg Miller](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer
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The CIA has launched a task force to assess the impact of the exposure of [thousands of U.S. diplomatic cables](#) and military files by [WikiLeaks](#).

Officially, the panel is called the WikiLeaks Task Force. But at CIA headquarters, it's mainly known by its all-too-apt acronym: W.T.F.

The irreverence is perhaps understandable for an agency that has been relatively unscathed by WikiLeaks. Only a handful of CIA files have surfaced on the WikiLeaks Web site, and records from other agencies posted online [reveal remarkably little](#) about CIA employees or operations.

Even so, CIA officials said the agency is conducting an extensive inventory of the classified information, which is routinely distributed on a dozen or more networks that connect agency employees around the world.

And the task force is focused on the immediate impact of the most recently released files. One issue is whether the agency's ability to recruit informants could be damaged by declining confidence in the U.S. government's ability to keep secrets.

"The director asked the task force to examine whether the latest release of WikiLeaks documents might affect the agency's foreign relationships or operations," CIA spokesman George Little said. The panel is being led by the CIA's Counterintelligence Center but has more than two dozen members from departments across the agency.

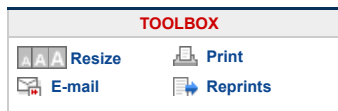
To some agency veterans, WikiLeaks has vindicated the CIA's long-standing aversion to sharing secrets with other government agencies, a posture that came under sharp criticism after it was identified as a factor that contributed to the nation's failure to prevent the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Even while moving to share more information over the past decade, the agency "has not capitulated to this business of making everything available to outsiders," said a former high-ranking CIA official who recently retired. "They don't even make everything available to insiders. And by and large the system has worked."

CIA veterans said most of the agency's international correspondence is classified at the "Secret" level, same as the records that ended up online. But the agency has always insisted on using its own systems.

As recently as two years ago, the agency rejected a request to make more of its intelligence reports available on the SIPRNET, the classified network used by the Pentagon to pass information around the world.

"We simply said we weren't going to do it," another former CIA official said. "The consensus was there were simply too many people potentially who had access."



The former officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss agency security measures.

Among those people with access to SIPRNET was a low-level U.S. Army intelligence analyst, Bradley E. Manning, who has been charged with disclosing classified information and is suspected of using a simple thumb drive to steal the files that were sent to WikiLeaks.

The CIA has had its own computer scandals. Security clearances for former CIA director John Deutch were suspended in the late 1990s after he was accused of keeping classified information on his computer at home.

Officials said the agency has also had internal difficulty keeping track of laptops that are sent to overseas stations, as well as sensitive information shared with thousands of contractors that the CIA has hired as part of a build-up over the past 10 years.

The agency employs software measures to minimize the chance of a WikiLeaks-like leak. Agency systems send warnings to administrators whenever a large amount of data is downloaded. And most of the CIA's computers are not equipped to allow the use of a removable drive.

Asked what might happen if he had inserted a thumb drive into the machine at his desk, the former senior CIA official quipped: "There would probably be a little trap door under my chair."

Even so, CIA security experts have fretted for years about the implications of moving secret information from pieces of paper to digital files that can be distributed online.

"It's just a huge vulnerability," the former high-ranking CIA officer said. "Nobody could carry out enough paper to do what WikiLeaks has done."

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