

U.S. Embassy Support for Hollywood’s Global Dominance: Cultural Imperialism Redux

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Hollywood’s global market power has been attributed to several factors, but little attention has been given to the support it receives from the U.S. government, especially State Department embassies. However, the release of more than 250,000 U.S. diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks in 2010 has provided scholars with an opportunity to examine in detail this aspect of U.S. government support for Hollywood’s market power. This article explores how the State Department’s global network of embassies supports Hollywood’s economic interests. I conclude that this state–Hollywood relationship is evidence of contemporary American cultural imperialism.

Keywords: cultural imperialism, Hollywood, WikiLeaks, film piracy, U.S. embassies, intellectual property rights (IPR), free trade agreements (FTAs)

Hollywood dominates the international film industry, with the six largest studios (Disney, Fox, Paramount, Sony, Universal, and Warner Brothers) accounting for \$22.4 billion of 2016’s total global box office take of \$38.6 billion (Motion Picture Association of America, 2017). Several factors—ranging from Hollywood’s inherent popular appeal to audiences, to its ability to absorb major financial losses, to the vast distribution and exhibition networks it controls—account for much of its global market dominance and have been documented in detail elsewhere (Crane, 2014; Gomery, 2004; Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, & Wang, 2004; K. Thompson, 1985; Walls & McKenzie, 2012). But this is only part of the story, and in recent years, scholars increasingly have recognized the range of support that Hollywood receives from the U.S. government (Miller et al., 2004; Miller & Maxwell, 2006; Mirrlees, 2016a; Wang, 2003)—a relationship that would lead Jack Valenti, the former president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), to state that “Hollywood and Washington are ‘sprung from the same DNA’” (Alford, 2009, pp. 153–154). As Miller (1996) argues, “Some crucial facts are forgotten in this terpsichory of diplomatic and business hypocrisy . . . [Hollywood] has been aided through decades of tax credit schemes, film commission assistance, State and Commerce Department representation” (p. 75).

This article uses data from the U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks in 2010 to investigate the relationship between the U.S. Department of State (commonly referred to as the State Department), or more specifically, its global network of embassies, and Hollywood. The State Department was established by Congress in 1789, and it is the federal executive department responsible for

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implementing U.S. foreign policy. It oversees more than 270 embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic posts worldwide, each one functioning as the hub of U.S. foreign policy initiatives in its respective host state (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Until recently, the State Department's connection to Hollywood has been examined in only a handful of articles that focus on the years immediately following the Second World War (Colman, 2009; Herman & McChesney, 1997; Jarvie, 1990; Lee, 2008; Schiller, 1992; Swann, 1991; Trumbour, 2007). Yet the WikiLeaks release provides an opportunity to explore how the support given to Hollywood by U.S. embassies operates in the 21st century and sheds light on the State Department's specific interest in free trade agreements (FTAs) and intellectual property rights (IPR). I argue that the links and connections revealed by this material represent the close alliance between the U.S. government and Hollywood capital, as theorized in contemporary iterations of American cultural imperialism.

I first began to research this process with an exploratory paper in 2017, which mapped out the operations of U.S. embassies in support of Hollywood's market dominance. I concluded that the increase in the volume and potency of this activity not only supported Victoria de Grazia's (2005) notion of a modern American "market empire" (Moody, 2017) but also extended the concept by emphasizing the role of the U.S. state in the creation and maintenance of this empire. A full description of my methodology can be found in that initial article, but in essence, the research presented here has been based on specific keyword searches of the full database of 251,287 diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, now hosted on its website, with key names re-referenced and supplemented by additional relevant terms that appear frequently in the documents. The material tends to focus on two main areas: (1) concerns about the penetration of American/Western ideology and values into international territories and (2) the effects that other countries' policies and actions have on the profitability of Hollywood productions.

My previous work addressed the first collection of documents, but in this article, I develop my argument further by investigating the latter theme: the U.S. State Department's support of Hollywood's economic interests around the world. I focus on examples of U.S. embassies' support of Hollywood's economic interests drawn from embassy cables released as part of the WikiLeaks tranche of documents. These cables highlight how the U.S. embassies monitor states in perceived IPR violation, enforce FTA and IPR agreements that are often detrimental to the countries with which they are ratified, and pursue punitive measures against countries that do not comply with its edicts. Overall, I argue that the U.S. government often circumvents its own "free trade" mantra by intervening to tilt the market in its favor. The case made here supports recent attempts by researchers to revise and update the cultural imperialism thesis by paying closer attention—conceptually and empirically—to the role of the U.S. state in bolstering and boosting Hollywood's economic interests around the world.

Cultural Imperialism Revisited

The concept of cultural imperialism emerged in the 1960s as a means of understanding the new dynamic of international relations after World War II, especially the role of the United States in the Cold War. As Mirrlees (2016b) argues,

In the post-WWII period, the U.S. Empire did not pursue the direct domination of territories, economies, and polities like bygone colonial Empires, but rather, sought to

build, integrate and police a world system of integrated states that shared its model: the capitalist mode of production, the liberal democratic state form, and the consumerist "way of life." (p. 5)

Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2015) identifies four versions of the concept, each differing subtly from one another, which were developed in the decades that followed World War II, distinguishing between his own work (Boyd-Barrett, 1977) and that of Harold Innis (1950), Herbert Schiller (1969), and Jeremy Tunstall (1977). Each of these versions at its core adopted the fundamental principle of the state intervening in cultural affairs to help exert and extend governmental power, but for all their similarities, it was Schiller's views that would have the greatest influence. Schiller defined his concept, first outlined in his *Communication and Cultural Domination*, as

the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system. (Schiller, 1976, p. 9)

For Schiller, this "dominating center" was the United States, and his theory of cultural imperialism presents the United States as the world's preeminent global influencer. As Sparks (2012) observes, Schiller claims that, first, "the media and cultural apparatuses of the USA, aided by the government, dominate the international trade in media" and, second, the "result of the continual consumption of this US-made material is effective propaganda for the ideas and values of the USA" (p. 284). These two propositions are at the core of most concepts of cultural imperialism.

However, since the 1990s, the concept has "been thoroughly discredited and more or less fallen out of mainstream usage" (Sparks, 2012, p. 281), as the competing theories of globalization, presented by Appadurai (1997), Liebes and Katz (1990), Strabhaar (1991), J. Thompson (1995), and Tomlinson (1991) "tended to discount the role of the state in favor of the relations between the global and the local" (Sparks, 2012, p. 282). By 1991, even Schiller was arguing that in the wake of the Cold War, "American cultural imperialism is not dead, but it no longer adequately describes the global cultural condition" (Schiller, 1991, pp. 14–15), although he did later restate his theory in his final publication before his death, *Living in the Number One Country* (Schiller, 2000). Despite the theory's critics, a handful of revisionist articles (Boyd-Barrett, 2015; Maxwell, 2003; McChesney, 2001; Mirrlees, 2016a, 2016b; Morley, 2006; Mosco, 2001; Murdock, 2006) have sought to engage with Schiller's original concept and reignite the wider project of cultural imperialism for the 21st century. For example, Dal Yong Jin has argued that despite much evidence contrary to the cultural imperialism thesis—such as the strength of indigenous media in countries supposedly dominated by the U.S. entertainment industry—in fact, the United States has merely evolved in its approach, "diversifying" and increasing its dominance "since developing countries lifted bans on foreign ownership and foreign investment as part of the globalization process" (Jin, 2007, p. 765). Jin concludes that U.S. dominance "now operates not only at the level of content but also at the level of form" (p. 767).

Likewise, Sparks (2012) has outlined a detailed revision of the theory “that is not subject to the kinds of criticisms that were applied to Schiller’s version” (p. 294). Although it is outside the scope of this article to cover his reappraisal in detail, it is important to note his definition of “what may properly be termed cultural imperialism,” which he succinctly identifies as “the use of state power in the international cultural sphere” (p. 293). Therefore, when revisiting contentious examples from when the concept was at its height in the 1970s and 1980s, he argues that “the close and open alliance between the U.S. State Department and the MPAA in ensuring that trade treaties guaranteed free access to national audio-visual markets, clearly fall within our revised category of cultural imperialism” (p. 294). I argue that the WikiLeaks cables reveal that this State Department activity has continued to the present day, and that it also occurs outside of these formal, public trade negotiations, operating as part of a systematic series of U.S. government interventions into the international film industry.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that in Sparks’s (2012) view, it is “not a necessary condition for cultural imperialism, or for the cultural consequences of imperialism, that they have a particular kind of impact upon their audiences” (p. 293). Although this article presents evidence of U.S. State Department embassy support for Hollywood’s economic interests, I do not make any direct claims of influence on specific films or filmmakers. Instead, it is my contention that the WikiLeaks cables provide a strong evidence base for the support of these revisionist theories by revealing several ways that the U.S. State Department supports Hollywood.

The next section identifies four ways that U.S. State Department embassies support Hollywood’s economic interests as indicated by the WikiLeaks cables: (1) as scouts for new Hollywood markets, (2) as promoters of FTAs, (3) as monitors of IPR, and (4) as influencers in their respective host nations. I derive examples from the cables to give evidential weight to each of these strategies for U.S. state support of Hollywood and to indicate the range of activities in which U.S. embassies were engaged.

Function 1: Embassies as Scouts for New Hollywood Markets

The first way that U.S. embassies support Hollywood is by monitoring and assessing local and national market conditions. The fundamental role played by any U.S. embassy is to report back to the State Department on the activities of its host state and their implications for U.S. commerce and international relations. This activity is detailed in several cables from the WikiLeaks release that merely observed issues relating to U.S. economic interests, describing events that might have had some future bearing on the profitability of Hollywood films and filmmakers. For example, in 2010, an embassy assessed the potential opportunities for Hollywood/Bollywood coproductions in Mumbai and outlined the potential difficulties Hollywood faced in making a blockbuster production with a studio partner in India:

Though not without challenges, major U.S. studios have started to try to capture a piece of this potentially lucrative market, in the world’s second fastest growing economy. U.S. studios ranging from Sony, Disney, and Warner Brothers have co-produced Hindi movies, attracted by the growth potential and opportunities in Indian cinema. While big budget Hollywood action films—dubbed in vernacular languages—have done relatively well in India, success has eluded Hollywood-Bollywood co-production partnerships so far.

The unpredictability and low success rate of Bollywood films makes the industry risky even for veteran industry stakeholders. (WikiLeaks, February 11, 2010: 10MUMBAI51)

For the Hollywood studios, the financial rewards from this market were potentially huge, but the cables point out that a barrier to these financial rewards was the cultural nationalism of the Indian screen industry. Sanjeev Lamba, the chief executive officer of the largest Indian film company, Reliance Entertainment, explained to the embassy that the Indian cinema landscape was “fiercely domestic” and Hollywood films accounted for only “three to six percent of the Indian film industry’s total revenues” (WikiLeaks, February 11, 2010: 10MUMBAI51). While acknowledging that interest in big-budget Hollywood productions was increasing, Lamba noted that *Avatar* (James Cameron, U.S., 2009) generated \$7 million at the Indian box office, compared with the \$42 million received by *3 Idiots* (Rajkumar Hirani, India, 2009), the most successful Bollywood film that year (WikiLeaks, February 11, 2010: 10MUMBAI51). Reliance’s chief operating officer, Jawahar Sharma, argued that instead of aggressively marketing existing Hollywood productions in India, the studios should seek Indian filmmakers to remake productions in Hindi, claiming that if the United States was to succeed in India, the studios had to “re-orient their strategies, rescind control and empower local people” (WikiLeaks, February 11, 2010: 10MUMBAI51), a policy adopted by Reliance itself with a \$325 million investment in Steven Spielberg’s production company DreamWorks (WikiLeaks, February 11, 2010: 10MUMBAI52).

However, the cables show that embassy scouting was not merely conducted in areas of obvious, significant commercial potential such as Mumbai, but would extend, as an investigation from 2009 demonstrates, to territories without a solid grounding in film production, such as Tajikistan. The embassy recounts a meeting with a “film industry worker” from Los Angeles, Jon Green, and a Tajik filmmakers’ association. The group was screening films in Dushanbe’s (the Tajik capital) only cinema, but this had recently been taken over for government use, so much of the conversation focused on ways to market and screen their productions. The cable describes a dichotomy in the Tajik filmmaking community between older filmmakers, who approached film as a hobby, and the younger generation, who saw this as a potential career and had ambitions to have their films screened outside of Tajikistan. These younger filmmakers were said to “indicate an affinity for Hollywood blockbusters” while “eschewing Tajik cultural influences” (WikiLeaks, July 16, 2009: 09DUSHANBE855). Despite this, they were critical of the amount of violence in American cinema, and Green believed there to be many obstacles to the production of any Hollywood films in the country.

On the surface, these two examples may appear to be mundane State Department assessments of the opportunities for American filmmakers in India and Tajikistan, but on closer reflection, they provide insight into the granular level of economic detail that U.S. embassies are interested in and highlight how embassies scout local and national market conditions for Hollywood. One might expect the Hollywood majors or the MPAA to spearhead this scouting, but the cables show the embassies on the front lines of this effort, conducting interviews with leading figures in Bollywood. U.S. interest in the affairs of Tajikistan, a small Central Asian state, speak more of the State Department’s perception of Tajikistan’s strategic importance in the region than its potential as a new market for Hollywood, but the fact that these elements are considered in tandem with each other highlights how U.S. foreign policy and Hollywood’s film trade interests are linked.

Function 2: Embassies as Promoters of FTAs

A second way that embassies support Hollywood is by promoting free trade. An example of this can be seen in the Casablanca consulate's assessment of the Moroccan government's measures to stimulate its film industry, which included tax exemptions for international producers. The intention was to capitalize on the success of Morocco's Souss-Massa-Draa region as a location for Hollywood productions, and the ambassador spoke positively of Morocco's "moral tolerance," which had enabled it to attract Hollywood productions that neighboring countries had rejected. It was felt that this, coupled with the U.S.–Morocco FTA that had been ratified in 2006, ensured that more Hollywood productions would locate in the region in the future (WikiLeaks, November 19, 2009: 09CASABLANCA210).

In contrast, countries that had developed cultural policy tools to protect the erosion of their indigenous film industries from audiovisual free trade (and Hollywood's dominance) were subject to extra scrutiny and, often, direct intervention. A cable from 2005 discussed the New Zealand government, which had announced three years earlier that assistance would be provided to its creative industries, ending the country's previous market-led cultural policy. A subsidy for large-scale film and television production, which covered 12.5% of the production costs in New Zealand, was also added in July 2003. Deputy chief of mission at the New Zealand embassy, David Burnett, was critical of the government in his comments in the cable, quoting an economic survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that concluded "film production subsidies set 'an unhelpful precedent'" (WikiLeaks, April 29, 2005: 05WELLINGTON342). Arguing for the prominence of a market-driven economy, Burnett claimed that the scheme would "not create a conducive environment for business to expand, create new jobs and improve labor productivity" (WikiLeaks, April 29, 2005: 05WELLINGTON342). These comments were made within the context of ongoing discussions about the establishment of a free trade agreement between the United States and New Zealand, one of many that was being negotiated at the time, often with cultural subsidies and legal protections forming the main barrier to talks.

In the same year, the United States had started to lobby South Korea to reduce its quota of indigenous films shown in its cinemas from 40% to 20% of annual screenings before it would even begin FTA negotiations. As Jin (2011) notes, "the Korean government had to use the screen quota system as a scapegoat in order to facilitate the FTA" (p. 657), which became its biggest bilateral trade agreement since NAFTA when it was finally ratified in 2012. Concerns that similar concessions would have to be made over the New Zealand cultural industries are partly why, to this date, New Zealand has not ratified a free trade agreement with the United States. As these examples demonstrate, embassy activity was focused on promoting audiovisual free trade against cultural protectionism in other countries to produce an economic environment that was more conducive to Hollywood.

Function 3: Embassies as Monitors of Hollywood's IPR

The third way the embassies support Hollywood's market dominance is by monitoring Hollywood's intellectual property rights. By far the most commonly discussed issue regarding Hollywood's economic interests was that of IPR, specifically relating to copyright violations—or in the parlance of many of the U.S. embassies, "piracy" (a hotly contested term that the U.S. State Department prefers not to use in public so as

not to glamorize copyright infringement). As Miller et al. (2004) explain, "copyright and the control of IP have underwritten Hollywood's internationalism because they stabilize the market and render it predictable, a crucial factor given the tremendous costs of feature film production" (p. 113). Thus, the State Department's role as a global IPR monitor was crucial to maintaining a solid foundation for the industry.

Numerous cables attest to these concerns, covering specific IPR situations in Australia (WikiLeaks, February 7, 2010: 10CANBERRA95), China (WikiLeaks, February 13, 2009: 09CHENGDU30), Great Britain (WikiLeaks, February 27, 2008: 08LONDON612; April 25, 2005: 08LONDON1171), Malaysia (WikiLeaks, February 25, 2010: 10KUALALUMPUR130), Spain (WikiLeaks, January 21, 2010: 10MADRID67), Sweden (WikiLeaks, October 28, 2009: 09STOCKHOLM676), and Taiwan (WikiLeaks, February 22, 2010: 10TAIPEI178), with the issue referred to in additional cables about dozens of other countries. Most bizarrely, and indicative of the scope of the embassy cables, was a report from Ankara in 2008 regarding plans by the mayor of the Turkish city of Batman, to sue Warner Brothers for unauthorized use of the city's name in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (U.S., 2008). Although it is easy to dismiss this report as frivolous, it is indicative of the importance assigned to copyright infringement that the deputy chief of mission in Turkey, Doug Silliman, argued that this was a positive development, because it represented an increased awareness of IPR enforcement issues (WikiLeaks, November 20, 2008: 08ANKARA2008) and thus could potentially help U.S. efforts to strengthen IPR in Turkey.

Much State Department activity in this area has its history in Section 301 of the Trade Act, which was amended in 1984 to "make it clear that the President had the authority to deal with states that failed to provide 'adequate and effective' protection for U.S. intellectual property" (Drahos & Braithwaite, 2002, p. 88). The Section 301 order assigns one of three distinct categories to countries in breach of U.S. guidelines on IPR, in the following order of severity: watch list, priority watch list, and priority foreign country. And the annual report published by the Office of the United States Trade Representative identifies countries whose intellectual property enforcement (or, more precisely, lack of enforcement) is perceived to harm U.S. trade. It has been estimated that the cost of piracy to the film industry was \$1.42 billion in 1998, dropping to \$1.29 billion in 2001—although, as a percentage of overall piracy losses, this represented an increase from 14% of total revenues in 1998 to 15.4% in 2001 (Wang, 2003, p. 29).

Much of the embassy cable material documents the U.S. State Department's chagrin at the allegedly vast scale of illegal copying, and this is coupled with withering criticisms of the failure of non-U.S. states to properly enforce U.S.-derived IPR legislation. Thus, in 2004, the Sao Paulo embassy complained that the then relatively new government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had "not yet developed a comprehensive national strategy" for dealing with film piracy (WikiLeaks, February 27, 2004: 04BRASILIA445), and a later cable asserted that "59 percent of films sold in Brazil are pirated, [but] the police regard movie piracy with a lower priority despite precincts dedicated to fighting IPR violations" (WikiLeaks, February 26, 2008: 08BRASILIA254). Likewise, Bolivia's La Paz embassy claimed that 87% of the Bolivian population bought pirated films, music, software, and books (WikiLeaks, February 26, 2010: 10LAPAZ368). Furthermore, in 2010, it was alleged by the San Salvador embassy that El Salvador had opened 128 cases relating to music or movie piracy (WikiLeaks, February 26, 2010: 10SANSALVADOR252) and that this came after the closure in 2008 of the Blockbuster video franchise in the country, also blamed on piracy (WikiLeaks, April 9, 2008: 08SANSALVADOR429). Brazil and Bolivia were both included on the

Office of the United States Trade Representative's "Special 301 Report" list, and more than 970 of the cables published by WikiLeaks referred to the term "Special 301," with many of these reports dealing directly with IPR infringement relating to Hollywood.

Russia was regarded as especially negligent in this area, with the Moscow embassy advising in 2009 that the country retain its Priority Watch List status, describing it as "years behind" implementation of IPR enforcement commitments it had made in 2006 (WikiLeaks, March 4, 2009: 09MOSCOW521). According to the MPAA, some licensed Russian DVD duplication plants produced illegal copies of films throughout the night, prompting several Hollywood studios to suspend their licensing agreements and establish their own facilities in the country. As the embassy put it, "Russia's inconsistent enforcement record, failure to curb piracy at notorious markets, lack of political leadership on IPR issues, and growing piracy problems in the regions, are all telltale signs of the endemic IPR problem" (WikiLeaks, March 4, 2009: 09MOSCOW521).

Much of the criticism of this perceived lack of leadership was directed at the Russian minister of culture, Aleksander Avdeev. The embassy claimed Avdeev had "not made any efforts to address IPR issues" and had not appointed a Russian cochair for a joint U.S.–Russia IPR Working Group (WikiLeaks, March 4, 2009: 09MOSCOW521). However, this was tempered by bans on camcording in cinemas and the sale of DVDs in train stations, which the embassy believed had led to a decrease in pirated material and a sharp rise in the purchase of legal DVDs.

The cables also depict a tense, fractious U.S. relationship with Canada, predicated on what was regarded as the increasingly vexatious problem of Canada's record of IPR violations. In 2005, the Canadian Motion Pictures Distributors Association (CMPDA) made the remarkable claim that "of all theaters which are used for camcording new-release movies, 40 percent are in Canada, with the majority of that 40 percent coming from just two theaters in Montreal" (WikiLeaks, October 4, 2005: 05OTTAWA2970). Later cables demonstrated that Canada was unwilling to make recording with a camcorder in a cinema a criminal offense (WikiLeaks, October 20, 2006: 06OTTAWA3179); however, by December 2006, the CMPDA had revised its 40% figure down to a more realistic 18%, or in other words, 54 illegal camcorder recordings in Montreal out of 295 worldwide (WikiLeaks, December 12, 2006: 06MONTREAL1220). A later cable provided additional data, stating that in 2003, there were only "three reported incidents of illegal camcording, whereas in 2005 there were 57 reported incidents" and added that, as of May 2005, "nearly 50% of the world's pirated movies, and 78% of illegal camcording in Canada, could be traced back to 17 Montreal theaters" (WikiLeaks, March 28, 2006: 06MONTREAL365). By February 2007, one of Canada's biggest exhibitors, Cineplex, also expressed concerns about this issue at a digital video conference (WikiLeaks, February 13, 2007: 07MONTREAL58), itself in response to communications between Bruce Snyder, 20th Century Fox's president of domestic distribution, and Cineplex's chief executive, Ellis Jacob.

The cables highlight Canada as a hub of illegal camcording activity, and suggest that Hollywood executives and State Department officials were displeased with the Canadian state for failing to counteract this copyright-violating practice. The documents also suggest that the embassies were not merely

monitoring engagement with IPR in other countries, but were in several instances directly intervening politically and ideologically within other countries to ensure that Hollywood's copyright was being upheld.

Function 4: Embassies as Influencers on Host Governments

The final way that embassies support Hollywood is by influencing key figures in their respective host nations so that market conditions are more conducive to Hollywood. In Abuja, the director general of the Nigerian Copyright Commission, Adembambo Adewopo, met with embassy staff and praised them for the IPR training programs they had organized along with the United States Patents and Trademark Office, which 18 Nigerian IPR officials had attended over the previous year. He implored the embassy to encourage U.S. companies to "establish a presence" in the country in the wake of a decision by the MPAA to advise its members to withdraw from distribution in Nigeria over IPR enforcement concerns (WikiLeaks, April 4, 2008: 08ABUJA619); the embassy also acknowledged that it would have to *increase* its activities in the country if it was to attract any support for stricter controls.

The Panama City embassy reported similar IPR interventions by the United States in 2006, detailing "embassy sponsored equipment donations to Panama's inter-institutional IPR Committee, MPAA sponsored movie screenings, [and] judicial exchange between members of Panama's judiciary and U.S. District Court" (WikiLeaks, February 21, 2007: 07PANAMA258).

In Nicaragua, the Managua embassy, in line with the Nicaraguan government, developed proposals for IPR enforcement in the region after outlining that the "U.S. entertainment industry faces an uphill struggle in Nicaragua in the face of rampant piracy" and that 13,000 videocassettes and 19,000 CDs were seized and destroyed by Nicaraguan police in 2005 (WikiLeaks, May 11, 2006: 06MANAGUA1043). Working with the Nicaraguan minister of trade, Alejandro Arguello, as well as Nicaraguan artists and businesses, the embassy helped to create a "home grown defense of Nicaraguan culture through an anti-piracy campaign" (WikiLeaks, February 2, 2006: 06MANAGUA256). However, at Arguello's request, the embassy did not advertise its role in the operation (WikiLeaks, February 2, 2006: 06MANAGUA256), arguing that a low profile would be best to avoid "the antibodies that will attack should the IPR legislation be perceived as a purely U.S. interest" (WikiLeaks, February 2, 2006: 06MANAGUA256).

But it was in Canada, which embassy monitoring had identified as having an especially problematic approach to IPR, where efforts were most pronounced. In early 2007, the Montreal embassy stated that it would "continue to engage in outreach with Canadian stakeholders across a wide range of sectors to emphasize that copyright protection benefits Canadian artists" (WikiLeaks, March 31, 2007: 07MONTREAL150), and the consulate in Toronto had met with the Ontario attorney general, Michael Bryant, to "urge a strengthening of intellectual property rights enforcement," with a further intention of raising the profile of "IPR enforcement concerns with Ontario provincial and municipal officials responsible for enforcing and prosecuting IPR violations" (WikiLeaks, March 16, 2007: 07TORONTO120). These measures included a plan to "seek appointments with Toronto area Police Chiefs to encourage them to strengthen efforts" (WikiLeaks, March 16, 2007: 07TORONTO120). The consulate general followed this up with a presentation of U.S. IPR policy at a four-day anticounterfeiting conference in Toronto (WikiLeaks, December 5, 2007: 07TORONTO466). A later cable in March 2007 from the Ottawa embassy suggested that, unless the

Canadian government made substantial progress on the issue over the next few weeks, Canada would be elevated to the Special 301 Priority Watch status (WikiLeaks, March 9, 2007: 07OTTAWA448).

This recommendation had followed a letter from the U.S. ambassador, David H. Wilkins, to the Canadian prime minister, Stephen Harper, on January 31, 2007, in which Wilkins announced his plans to meet the minister of heritage, Bev Oda, and the minister of industry, Maxime Bernier, on the matter, promising that "The United States is committed to supporting Canada's efforts to create an intellectual property rights framework that promotes a high standard of protection, that encourages innovation, and that spurs economic growth in Canada" (WikiLeaks, April 26, 2007: 07OTTAWA765). On June 1, 2007, Canada introduced legislation to criminalize the act of recording films being shown in a cinema (WikiLeaks, June 5, 2007: 07OTTAWA1076), and it is clear from the WikiLeaks releases that U.S. embassy pressure was extremely influential in getting this issue raised in the Canadian parliament.

In the intervening period, the U.S. embassy in Ottawa met with University of Ottawa law professor Michael Geist on April 12, 2007, to discuss Canada's IPR arrangements. They recorded that, although Geist's views were "generally at odds with U.S. policy," nonetheless they were "taken seriously by the Canadian public, academia, and members of the Canadian government" (WikiLeaks, April 18, 2007: 07OTTAWA691). The detailed account of the meeting portrayed Geist as a staunch defender of existing Canadian law and someone who believed Hollywood was exaggerating the problem of illegal recording in cinemas. The embassy cast Geist's views as reflecting "deeply ingrained Canadian preferences to protect and nurture homegrown artists" (WikiLeaks, April 18, 2007: 07OTTAWA691).

Geist appeared frequently in the Ottawa embassy cables, such as in a reference to his opposition to IPR law in a cable from May 2007, which confirmed that legislation to criminalize camcorder recordings in cinemas was imminent (WikiLeaks, May 11, 2007: 07OTTAWA887). A cable from October 2007 discussed the announcement by the Canadian government of a three-step strategy to strengthen the protection of IPR—and mentioned Geist again, referring to his analysis of the Canadian government's reference to "conformity with" rather than "ratification of" the World Intellectual Property Organization Internet Treaties (WikiLeaks, October 22, 2007: 07OTTAWA1955). Geist was referred to again in a cable outlining the Canadian government's Bill C-61 (which was an attempt to amend Canada's copyright laws), in which he compared it with the heavily criticized U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act (WikiLeaks, June 12, 2008: 07OTTAWA794). These accounts further demonstrate the actions U.S. embassies take in support of Hollywood's economic interests.

Of all the Canadian cables, the most revealing one outlined the U.S. frustration at what it perceived to be Canada's lack of action regarding its IPR laws. It confirmed that Prime Minister Harper had promised President Bush in August 2007 that Canada "would pass copyright legislation" and that "senior GoC officials, especially Industry Minister [Jim] Prentice, repeatedly assured the ambassador and senior Mission Canada officers that the copyright bill would be introduced 'soon'" (WikiLeaks, August 27, 2007: 07OTTAWA1639). To keep track of the progress of this legislation, the Ottawa embassy arranged for Ailish Johnson, an analyst in the Canadian government's Privy Council Office, to brief embassy staff about the content of letters from Harper to Prentice and from Harper to the newly appointed Minister of Canadian Heritage Josée Verner, in which Harper asked both to introduce a copyright bill by the end of the year

(WikiLeaks, August 27, 2007: 07OTTAWA1639). Geist was once more mentioned in this cable, in a description of a meeting chaired by Doug George, the director of foreign affairs and International Trade Canada's Intellectual Property Office:

George cautioned that if Canada were retained on the 301 Watch List—or even elevated to the Priority Watch List—it could affect future Canadian cooperation on IPR as well as give ammunition to Dr. Geist and his acolytes, who see a revised copyright bill as a “U.S. plot.” (WikiLeaks, February 29, 2008: 08OTTAWA311)

The C-61 copyright amendment bill was eventually superseded by Bill C-32 in June 2010, and subsequently by Bill C-11, which received royal assent in June 2012 and contained many of the measures that the U.S. embassy had lobbied for (e.g., strict digital rights management enforcement). That the embassy had arranged for briefings to be received from an analyst in the Canadian government suggests that there was substance to the claims from “Geist’s acolytes” that this was in fact a “U.S. plot.” The evidence presented in these cables demonstrates that, at the very least, U.S. lobbying on this issue was intensive and went as high as the Canadian prime minister.

Conclusion

This article describes how the U.S. State Department has coordinated its embassies in support of Hollywood in four key ways:

1. Embassies function as scouts, gathering data about the political, social, and economic conditions in countries that Hollywood has, or may have, a business stake in.
2. Embassies promote audiovisual free trade agreements that are heavily weighted in Hollywood's favor.
3. Embassies monitor Hollywood's IPR enforcement or violation in other countries.
4. Embassies attempt to influence the political and business leaders of other countries to embrace Hollywood's interests via training programs, equipment donations, and lobbying.

This overview of the many ways that U.S. State Department embassies support Hollywood's economic interests in countries around the world problematizes existing theories of globalization, which present state sovereignty in decline vis-à-vis “globalizing” media companies. The WikiLeaks cables suggest that instead, the U.S. government supports Hollywood's economic interests in other countries using a variety of strategies and tactics. While these embassies were aggressively pursuing FTAs and IPR reform as part of a wider project to “liberalize” international film markets, the evidence presented here demonstrates that their own actions were intended to facilitate this market in America's favor. Although they were not always successful, this activity problematizes attempts to explain Hollywood's dominance *solely* as a product of its wide public appeal or as a result of laissez-faire economic policy. Hollywood is the

international leader in cinematic entertainment, but the WikiLeaks cables show how this dominance is supported and maintained by the U.S. State Department's global network of embassies. American cultural imperialism—the global market power of Hollywood studios and their products facilitated and legitimized by the geopolitical power of the U.S. state—continues.

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