

SEGL SPEECHWRITING CASE STUDY / FALL 2013
September 30, 2013

All of the information in this case study is hypothetical. The narrative and questions are intended solely as an academic exercise exploring the tensions between the public's right to know and the need for national security.

Throughout the conflict in Syria between the forces of President Bashar al-Assad and opponents to his regime, the United States has sought diplomatic solutions to the crisis while tacitly supporting the opposition movement and publicly endorsing “regime change.” But now a prominent journalist for *The Washington Post* has just acquired highly classified documents – leaked by a high-ranking official at the CIA – showing that American intelligence operatives are working covertly in Syria to plot the assassination of Assad. The documents include phone and text messages that confirm that the CIA has paid “moles” on the ground in Syria to infiltrate Assad’s security apparatus and help plan his assassination. It also confirms that the NSA is gaining invaluable intelligence from secretly listening to the communications between Syrian human rights activists / aid workers – members of the opposition to Assad’s regime – and their Syrian-American supporters in the U.S. These communications indicate that many of the activists and aid workers are coordinating with anti-Assad fighters (for example, providing medical assistance to injured soldiers).

There are at least two undisputed facts related to this case:

- 1) U.S. law prohibits the U.S. government or its operatives from assassinating heads of foreign governments.
- 2) Publication of this information will likely unmask human rights activists, aid workers, and other Syrians who have worked against the Assad regime in Syria, putting their lives at risk.

On the theory that the United States government is engaging in an unethical and illegal activity – plotting to kill a foreign head of state – *The Washington Post* publishes the story over the vocal objections of the President and his Administration, who argue that releasing this information will undermine American diplomatic efforts in a volatile region of the world and will reveal to our enemies important American strategies and tactics in the war on terrorism. The administration also believes the *Post* is compromising the lives of Syrian activists and aid workers by showing their links to opposition fighters.

As a result of the story, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations – herself a former human rights activist – resigns in protest, disgusted that the American intelligence operatives would authorize an illegal assassination and tap the communication of ordinary Americans with no conceivable links to terrorism.

Should the CIA leaker be prosecuted for compromising national security or hailed as a heroic whistleblower rooting out excesses by the U.S. government?

Speech #1: The President must convince that American people and Congress that prosecutions are necessary because both the CIA official who leaked the information and the journalist who wrote the story have done irreparable damage to national security by making this information public. Please write a 2-3 minute statement from the President that he will deliver from the Oval Office to the American people.

Speech #2: The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations must explain publicly why she is resigning, specifically why the public’s right to know highly sensitive, classified information should override concerns about national security. Please write a 2-3 minute statement that she will deliver on the steps of the U.S. Capitol to an assortment of human rights activists and freedom of information advocates.