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WikiLeaks Cables Reveal U.S. Sought to Retaliate Against Europe over Monsanto GM Crops

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U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks reveal the Bush administration drew up ways to retaliate against Europe for refusing to use genetically modified seeds. In 2007, then-U.S. ambassador to France Craig Stapleton was concerned about France's decision to ban cultivation of genetically modified corn produced by biotech giant Monsanto. He also warned that a new French environmental review standard could spread anti-biotech policy across Europe. We speak with Jeffrey Smith of the Institute for Responsible Technology. [includes rush transcript]



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Guest:

Jeffrey Smith, executive director of the [Institute for Responsible Technology](#). He is author of two books: *Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies about the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating* and *Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods*.

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RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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JUAN GONZALEZ: U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks reveal the Bush administration drew up ways to retaliate against Europe for refusing to use genetically modified seeds. In 2007, then-US ambassador to France Craig Stapleton was concerned about France's decision to ban cultivation of genetically modified corn produced by biotech giant Monsanto. He also warned that a new French environmental review standard could spread anti-biotech policy across Europe.

In the leaked cable, Stapleton writes, quote, "Europe is moving backwards not forwards on this issue with France playing a leading role, along with Austria, Italy and even the [European] Commission...Moving to retaliation will make clear that the current path has real costs to EU interests and could help strengthen European pro-biotech voice."

AMY GOODMAN: Ambassador Stapleton goes on to write, quote, "Country team Paris recommends that we calibrate a target retaliation list that causes some pain across the EU since this is a collective responsibility, but that also focuses in part on the worst culprits. The list should be measured rather than vicious and must be sustainable over the long term, since we should not expect an early victory," he wrote.

Well, for more, we're going to Iowa City to speak with Jeffrey Smith, executive director of the Institute for Responsible Technology, author of two books, *Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies about the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating* and the book *Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods*.

Jeffrey Smith, joining us by *Democracy Now!* video stream, thanks so much for being with us. Talk about the significance of these documents leaked by WikiLeaks.

JEFFREY SMITH: Well, we've been saying for years that the United States government has joined at—is joined at the hip with Monsanto and pushing GMOs as part of Monsanto's agenda on the rest of the world. This lays bare the mechanics of that effort. We have Craig Stapleton, the former ambassador to France, specifically asking the U.S. government to retaliate and cause some harm throughout the European Union. And then, two years later, in 2009, we have a cable from the

ambassador to Spain from the United States asking for intervention there, asking the government to help formulate a biotech strategy and support the government—members of the government in Spain that want to promote GMOs, as well. And here, they specifically indicate that they sat with the director of Monsanto for the region and got briefed by him about the politics of the region and created strategies with him to promote the GMO agenda.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Now, they apparently were especially interested in one Monsanto product, MON 810. Could you talk about that?

JEFFREY SMITH: Yes. This is the first seed that was approved for widespread planting. You see, the biotech industry was concerned initially about the European Union accepting genetically modified foods. Although that had been approved for years by the commission, the food industry had rejected it because consumers were concerned. And so, there hasn't been a lot of food going to the European Union that's genetically modified.

However, they had planned to allow the growing of genetically modified seeds. Now that MON 810 has been allowed, individual countries have stepped forward to ban in. And so, in 2007, they were concerned about that, and so they were trying to create a strategy to force these countries to accept the first of the genetically modified seeds. Since then, there's been more evidence showing that this genetically modified corn damages mice and rats, etc., can cause reductions of fertility, smaller litter sizes, smaller offspring, immune responses, etc. And these have gone largely ignored by both the European Food Safety Authority and the United States FDA.

AMY GOODMAN: Talk about these health effects. Jeffrey Smith, you wrote a fascinating "Anniversary of a Whistleblowing Hero" piece about a British scientist and about the repercussions he suffered. He was one of the biggest GMO advocates. And explain what happened and what he actually learned.

JEFFREY SMITH: Well, Dr. Arpad Pusztai was actually working on a \$3 million grant from the U.K. government to figure out how to test for the safety of GMOs. And what he discovered quite accidentally is that genetically modified organisms are inherently unsafe. Within 10 days, his supposedly harmless GMO potatoes caused massive damage to rats—smaller brains, livers and testicles, partial atrophy of the liver, damaged immune system, etc. And what he discovered was it was the process, the generic process of genetic engineering, that was likely the cause of the problem. He went public with his concerns and was a hero.

AMY GOODMAN: But I think you have to—Jeffrey Smith, if you could explain this. This is very significant, because he was an expert on the protein that was—it's this kind of insecticide. And everyone thought, oh, that might be the thing that would hurt people. But he said, actually, it wasn't the thing that was injected into the—or however it works when you genetically modify a potato, when you put that chemical inside, the protein inside the potato—it wasn't that.

JEFFREY SMITH: Exactly. You see, he was testing with rats that were eating the genetically modified potato, engineered to produce an insecticidal protein. But he also tested other groups of rats that were eating natural potatoes that were spiked with that same protein, and then a third group that was just eating natural potatoes without the insecticide. Only the group that ate the genetically engineered potato got these problems, not the group that was eating the potatoes along with the insecticide. So it clearly wasn't the insecticide; it was somehow the process of genetic engineering.

Now, that process creates massive collateral damage inside the DNA of the plant. Hundreds and thousands of mutations can be formed. There could be hundreds or thousands of genes that are natural genes in the plant that change their levels of

expression. For example, with MON 810 corn, they found that there was a gene that is normally silent that is switched on and now creates an allergen in corn. They found 43 different genes that were significantly up-regulated or down-regulated, meaning that there's massive changes in these crops and they're not being evaluated by the U.S.—by the FDA or any other regulatory authority around the world before being put onto the market.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Now, was there any indication from the cables or from your research that the pressure that Ambassador Stapleton and other U.S. officials were putting on the E.U. had the desired effect? Because obviously Ambassador Stapleton, or former Ambassador Stapleton, was not just any former ambassador, he was the former co-owner of the Texas Rangers with former President George W. Bush.

JEFFREY SMITH: Well, we've seen a consistent effort by the U.S. to bully Europe. But, you see, European—the European mind on this is kind of divided. Some countries are clearly in the camp of precautionary principle and protecting interests for health. Others are basically moving in lockstep with the U.S. government and Monsanto. So it's a fiercely pitched battle on every front in Europe.

A lot of the focus of the State Department has been on developing countries. They try and push GMOs into Africa. They deployed the Secretary of State's chief advisory—scientific adviser, Nina Fedoroff, to Australia and to India. They tried to engage the Indian government with a contract or a treaty that would allow their scientists to be trained in the U.S. So they've been working around the world to try and influence policy on every single continent. And in some cases, they're doing—they're actually winning, where they're overtaking the regulatory authorities and making it quite weak, like it is in the U.S. And in some cases in Europe now, there's more resistance than ever, now that it's "not in my backyard" politics, "no planting in my country" type of politics.

AMY GOODMAN: Jeffrey Smith, can you compare the Obama administration on biotechnology with the Bush administration?

JEFFREY SMITH: Unfortunately, we were hoping for a lot more success. President Obama, while he was campaigning here in Iowa, promised that he would require labeling of genetically modified crops. And since most Americans say they would avoid GMOs if labeled, that would have eliminated it from the food supply. But, you see, he and the FDA have been promoting the biotechnology. And unfortunately, the Obama administration has not been better than the Bush administration, possibly worse.

For example, the person who was in charge of FDA policy in 1992, Monsanto's former attorney, Michael Taylor, he allowed GMOs on the market without any safety studies and without labeling, and the policy claimed that the agency was not aware of any information showing that GMOs were significantly different. Seven years later, because of a lawsuit, 44,000 secret internal FDA memos revealed that that policy was a lie. Not only were the scientists at the FDA aware that GMOs were different, they had warned repeatedly that they might create allergies, toxins, new diseases and nutritional problems. But they were ignored, and their warnings were even denied, and the policy went forth allowing the deployment GMOs into the food supply with virtually no safety studies. That person in charge is now the U.S. food safety czar in the Obama administration.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And what is your general assessment of the sweeping reform that the Obama administration pushed through of the FDA, considered one of the biggest reforms of that agency in decades? Your assessment of it?

JEFFREY SMITH: Well, if the FDA were absolutely dedicated to protecting public health, giving them more power makes sense. But investigation after investigation

for years, it turns out that they often serve their, quote, "clients," which is industry. Even one-third of their own surveyed members in September revealed that they believe that corporate and special interests really dictates policy in the area of public health. So, my opinion is, giving them more power without first eliminating that bias towards corporations is a dangerous formula. In fact, they are officially mandated with promoting the biotech industry, which is obviously a conflict of interest.

AMY GOODMAN: I know both Eric Schlosser and also Michael Pollan have hailed the food safety legislation, but on the issue of talking to the State Department and what they're pushing abroad, I want to just say we did call the State Department and did not get a response. We wanted them to come on today's broadcast.

Finally, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Jeffrey Smith, your assessment?

JEFFREY SMITH: Well, he was our governor here in Iowa, and he was the biotech governor of the year in 2001. And unfortunately, he's been following that course of action since he has been put in office. They released today the environmental impact statement for alfalfa, where they ignore their own data regarding the increase of pesticides because of GMOs. They ignore the data of their own scientists and other scientists, which show the use of Roundup, which will be promoted through this Roundup Ready alfalfa, is actually very toxic both for the environment and for human health. And so, he, as well as many others of the Obama administration, have been taken essentially from the biotech ranks and are now calling the shots there. And I'm very disappointed.

There was some indication in the EIS, however, for the alfalfa that he might take into consideration concerns about contamination, which we all know is permanent, where the self-propagating genetic pollution of genetically modified foods can outlast the effects of global warming and nuclear waste. It's being released now without— with very little concern. Finally, we see some ray of light, where they're actually paying attention, but it's not enough. It's not based really on science.

AMY GOODMAN: We're going to leave it there, but we will certainly continue to follow this issue, Jeffrey Smith, it's great to be with you, joining us from Iowa City, executive director of the Institute for Responsible Technology, author of two books, *Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies about the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating* and also *Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods*. This is *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, *The War and Peace Report*. We'll link to our stories on Monsanto over the years and of course to our continued coverage of the WikiLeaks cables, the largest trove of U.S. diplomatic documents that have been ever released.



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